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Peter Alexander Rowan M.A.

Proclaiming the Peacemaker:

The Malaysian Church as an Agent of Reconciliation in a Multicultural Society

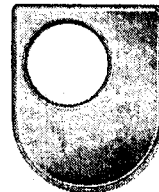
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Abstract

With a history of racial violence and in recent years, low-level ethnic tensions, the themes of peaceful coexistence and social harmony are recurring ones in the discourse of Malaysian society. In such a context, we consider the role of the church as a reconciling agent.

We begin by setting out a *prima facie* case for the doctrine of reconciliation. Interacting with the works of various scholars the main contours of reconciliation are traced, underlining it as a central New Testament theme. Recent years have seen the emergence of missiological readings of reconciliation, and a paradigm of mission in which the social implications of reconciliation highlight the importance of the local church as an agent of peace. Insight into the socio-political context of Malaysia is gained from a survey questionnaire which draws our attention to the relative absence of peacemaking initiatives at the local church level. Seven key themes emerge from the survey results, and the seventh - that of identity, is the key theme to be reckoned with if Malaysian churches are to be agents of reconciliation.

This thesis argues that a reconciling presence within a divided society like Malaysia necessitates an ethos of peacemaking. This is created and sustained when Christians understand that their identity has been transformed in Jesus Christ. Our aim will be to demonstrate that being an agent of reconciliation is directly linked to our effectiveness in bearing witness to an identity given by Christ. The concluding section draws from the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer to support the idea that peace is created as a result of the integration of the self and sustained not in isolation but in fellowship with our neighbour.

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Introduction

Stating the Problem

The Malaysian church exists as a minority community in a multicultural context, where racial tensions are present and religious liberties are restricted. All Christians are commissioned to "make disciples of all nations" and are called to be peacemakers. But given the challenges of their specific context, how are Malaysian churches to combine proclamation with peacemaking? This thesis takes the position that both are part of the mission God gives his church, and both can be combined in the exercising of a ministry of reconciliation. But what shape does such a mission take in a divided and multicultural society like Malaysia? Our investigation examines how Malaysian Christians can proclaim the Peacemaker, Jesus Christ, by being his agents of reconciliation in a multicultural society.

The Malaysian historian, Cheah Boon Kheng has said that "since its birth, Malaysia has lacked a clear cut sense of national identity."¹ And in a recently published work, *Multiethnic Malaysia*, it has been argued that

ethnicity itself has been constructed in such a restrictive way not only by the state but by key civil society agents that it has become in Malaysia... a rigid marker used to divide people instead of being applied in more expansive and encompassing terms. We may thus conclude that despite shared historical experiences and common cultural references the 'recovery of self' from a colonial legacy, which had as its ideological core not only the construction of white superiority but also the production of ethnic difference among the colonised, has proved daunting for Malaysians.²

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- ¹ Cheah Boon Kheng, "Ethnicity in the Making of Malaysia," in *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 93.
 - ² Sheila Nair, "Colonialism, Nationalism, Ethnicity: Constructing Identity and Difference" in *Multiethnic Malaysia: Past, Present and Future* ed. Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes, Azly Rahman (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Institute of Development and Asian Studies / Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2009), 93.

The church in Malaysia has not been immune from the restrictive ways in which ethnic identities have been constructed in Malaysia. If the church is to be an agent of reconciliation it must first be clear about its Christian identity within its Malaysian context. This self-understanding, we argue, lies at the heart of the formation of an ethos of peacemaking.

The evangelical church in Malaysia is generally energetic in evangelism and church growth. However, because of Muslim sensitivities and government impositions, the church's engagement in mission to the wider society can sometimes fall prey to certain claims that evangelism in a multi-religious society contributes to ethnic tension. Moreover, the fear of such claims prevents many churches from engaging in holistic mission to the wider society. While it could be argued that the claims about churches contributing to ethnic tension are false and that evangelism is not the cause of such tensions, a more comprehensive approach is required because the evangelical church as a whole remains passive in the area of social transformation. While not pursuing a defense of evangelism or the particular claims that such activity contributes to ethnic tension, we shall pursue the topic of reconciliation and the extent to which the Malaysian church understands this as being part of biblical mission, and understands itself to be a reconciling agent to the wider society. In broad terms this requires a preliminary look at the biblical, theological and missiological issues surrounding reconciliation. It also necessitates a setting out of the socio-historical context, together with a sociological investigation to examine the attitudes of Malaysian Christians to the church's role in society. These will then enable us to identify theological priorities and make practical recommendations for the Malaysian context.

The Rationale for the Study

This thesis contains theological, historical and sociological components. This three-fold approach is necessary because our theological thinking is being directed to a theme of particular importance in a specific context: a fragmented society seeking integration, and whose disintegration is very much connected to its historical past and exacerbated by the socio-political realities of the present.

Four research areas are addressed in this thesis. The first concerns the theology of reconciliation and how recent missiological readings of this doctrine are helping to shape our understanding and practice of mission in the twenty-first century. As we shall see in chapter one, the doctrine of reconciliation has often been understood in a limited and narrow way. It has also been neglected in many missiological works, most notably in David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (1991). The past decade, however, has seen the tide turn in this respect. The authors of a recent text on the theology of mission state that

reconciliation is more than merely a task of missions; it is central to the overarching purpose and nature of mission. The restored relationship with God, and its attendant restored human relations, is central to the message of the gospel. The kingdom of God is characterised not merely by an absence of evil, injustice, or alienation, but positively by the restoration of harmony and fullness in both the vertical and the horizontal dimension of the human experience.³

Our thesis takes up the doctrine of reconciliation in order to explore and apply it to the Malaysian context. In doing so we are contributing to the shaping of a theology of mission for the Malaysian church.

³. Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, Timothy C. Tennent, *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2010), 97.

The second issue relates to history. It is important for our thesis to discover the main reasons why Malaysia has become such a complex society and to appreciate how this complexity affects the Christian churches and their mission of reconciliation within that society. What are the root causes to the serious and sometimes violent inter-ethnic tensions in Malaysia? Can a process of Islamisation be identified in Malaysia and if so, what has its effects been on the non-Muslim communities? Given that since independence Malaysian identity has largely been determined by the politics of ethnic-nationalism, what does this mean for the Christian community in particular? How can Malaysian Christians form an identity that is not so closely associated with the church's colonial past?

The third issue relates to identity. The Indian theologian Michael Amaladoss has said that "one of the obstacles that prevent Christians from playing their proper role in promoting harmony in South Asia is that they are not sure of their own identity and rootedness."⁴ In Malaysia, the theme of identity is a recurring one within the wider society, and deserves greater theological reflection in relation to the church and its reconciling mission. A connection between the effectiveness of the church's witness and its sense of identity has been emphasised in the work of Hwa Yung, Bishop of the Methodist Church in Malaysia: "If they [Christians] have no clear sense of identity of who they are in Christ... it is impossible for them to proclaim the gospel with confidence and clarity. Or, they may have a clear sense of identity and dignity in Christ, but nevertheless lack confidence and rootedness in their own culture..."⁵ It is therefore important to consider the dimensions of Christian identity and we do so in chapter five under historical, relational and ecclesial

⁴. Michael Amaladoss, "Identity and Harmony: Challenges to Mission in South Asia" in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, ed. Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 39.

⁵. Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission," The 5th David Adeney Memorial Lecture, Thursday, 31st August, 2000, Singapore Hakka Methodist Church (Unpublished Paper - organised by the Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore), 2.

headings. In our opening chapter's discussion on reconciliation we briefly examine the Pauline allusions to Isaiah and the theme of peace in Ephesians 2. That Pauline chapter is significant for the way in which the themes of identity and peace are set within an ecclesiological context. Peace is made between Jew and Gentile as each receive the gift of a new identity in Christ. What are the implications of this for Malaysian Christian self-identity and peacemaking in the twenty-first century?

Finally, our research includes a survey questionnaire on attitudes of Malaysian Christians to the themes of mission, reconciliation and peacemaking in their society. No such quantitative research across a range of denominations, languages and geographical areas has previously been conducted in Malaysia. This is an important element contributing to the originality of the thesis.

The Missiological Framework for the Study

The majority of those theologians with whom we interact - particularly in chapter four - can be said to operate, in a general sense, within a missiological framework that has been described as “critical missiology from the periphery”. This phrase originates with Samuel Escobar, a Latin American missiologist who, in his analysis of post-World War II missiology, has identified three missiological approaches. The first, 'post-imperial missiology', comes from Evangelicals in Britain and Europe and is characterised by “an awareness that the imperial domination [Britain and Europe] used to exert is gone and new patterns of relationships have developed.”⁶ Secondly Escobar speaks of 'managerial missiology'. Originating from the United States of America this missiological paradigm is

⁶ Samuel Escobar, “Evangelical Missiology: Peering into the Future,” in *Global missiology for the 21st century: the Iguassu dialogue*, ed. W. Taylor (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2000), 107.

particularly associated with a “cluster of Evangelical institutions in Pasadena, California” with the aim of reducing “Christian mission to a manageable enterprise”, combining “a strong sense of urgency” with “an effort to use every available instrument to make the task possible.”⁷ According to Escobar, the third missiological approach, 'critical missiology from the periphery', comes from the two-thirds world. It is 'critical' in the sense that it takes a critical approach to those earlier paradigms that have dominated mission thinking from the second half of the twentieth century, being especially critical of “managerial missiology”. The focus of this missiological approach “is not how much missionary action is required today but what kind of missionary action is necessary.”⁸ This paradigm of mission is offered by practitioners who themselves live and work among the economically poor, in pluralist societies where Christian communities are in the minority and where those communities may expect to face persecution. The hallmarks of this approach are twofold: “the criticism of existing patterns of mission and the proposal of a missiology that corresponds to the missionary challenges of the day.”⁹ In this approach, as the gospel is brought to bear on the “challenges of the day”, its “socially transformative dimensions are unavoidable.”¹⁰

The growing missiological approach of evangelicals in Asia is that of “mission as transformation”, which is “now a mainstream definition of mission in orthodox Christian circles, especially in the Two Thirds World and among those involved in ministry with the

7. Ibid, 109.

8. Ibid, 112.

9. Ibid, 112.

10. Ibid, 113.

poor.”¹¹ Influential in the development of this understanding of mission has been the

Indian mission theologian, Vinay Samuel, who defines it as follows:

Transformation is to enable God’s vision of society to be actualised in all relationships, social, economic, and spiritual, so that God’s will may be reflected in human society and his love be experienced by all communities, especially the poor.¹²

Warren Beattie has recently explored the missiological perspectives of five leading

Evangelicals in Asia in order to show the development in Asia of what has become known

as “transformational missiology”, which he describes in these terms:

Evangelicals in Asia favour an approach to missiology which can be termed “transformational missiology” - this is an approach to mission which emphasises the transformation of individual lives, communities, and wider societies... As mission in context, transformational missiology results in an engagement in nation-building and a response to the multi-religious nature of Asian societies. It envisages communities of the kingdom which can engage in these spheres at local levels.¹³

Most of the Malaysian theologians and missiologists whose works are referred to in this thesis can generally be identified with the paradigm of “critical missiology from the periphery” in terms of geographical location and missiological perspective. Not all may necessarily identify themselves as evangelical, nor as missiologists, but in various ways they all challenge existing approaches to mission, and by giving careful attention to the Malaysian context they encourage the Christian community towards “engagement in nation-building and a response to the multi-religious nature of [Malaysian society].”¹⁴

¹¹. Chris Sugden, *Gospel Culture and Transformation: A Reprint with a New Introduction of Part Two of Seeking the the Asian Face of Jesus*, (Oxford: Regnum, 2000), vii.

¹². Vinay Samuel, in Chris Sugden, *Gospel Culture and Transformation*, vii.

¹³. Warren Beattie, “Evangelical paradigms of mission in Asia: the influence of biblical foundations in shaping a more integrated theology of mission,” OMF Mission Research Consultation 2007, OMF IHQ, Cluny Road, Singapore, 17-21 September, 2007 (Unpublished paper), 13.

¹⁴. Ibid, 13.

The Methodology of the Study

Since the gospel will always be about reconciliation, whatever the context, we have chosen to begin this thesis with a chapter on the theology of reconciliation. The theme of reconciliation is first of all not required by the context of Malaysia but by the content of the gospel. Nevertheless, when it comes to the application of the doctrine of reconciliation we pay close attention to the Malaysian context. Chapter one uses the systematic method to set out the theological and biblical foundations of reconciliation. As well as using standard texts in theological and biblical studies, we draw on the works of scholars who have given specific attention to our theme.

In the second chapter the historical method is used. We examine standard works on Malaysian history, published and unpublished papers, together with relevant scholarly journal articles in order to map out Malaysia's early history, the arrival of Islam, colonialism, independence from British rule, and issues facing the modern state of Malaysia. This chapter enables us to locate the church within the socio-historical context of Malaysia and to identify certain contemporary challenges which it now faces.

To gain further insight into the socio-political context of Malaysia a survey questionnaire is used in chapter three to gather data on the attitudes of Malaysian Christians to the church's role in society. The method followed in constructing and using the survey-questionnaire is set out in detail in the opening sections of the chapter. Guidance in the initial stages of this social research was given by Dr. David Burnett, a Social Anthropologist and former Academic Dean of All Nations Christian College, England. There was extensive consultation with Dr. Paul Fleming, Pro-Vice Chancellor of the College of Science, University of Canterbury, Christchurch, New Zealand. Dr. Fleming had access to the raw data from the survey and checked the chapter as it now appears in the

thesis.

In chapter four the systematic method is employed to analyse seven themes arising from the survey questionnaire. These themes are discussed using the works of mostly Malaysian theologians and church leaders. It is important that we allow the voices of those living and working in the Malaysian context to be heard. This chapter gives proper attention to attitudes of indigenous church members from across a range of traditions to mission, reconciliation and peacemaking in the Malaysian context.

In chapter five we again use the systematic method. Our study in chapters three and four helps identify the theological priority of identity and we explore this theme in chapter five in relation to an ethos of peacemaking. Key aspects of the theological and biblical foundations set out in chapter one are applied to the Malaysian context in the light of our findings in chapters 2, 3, and 4. Our starting point in chapter five is with Robert J. Schreiter's perspective on spirituality and reconciliation. Attention is then paid to the works of Birger Gerhardsson, *The Ethos of the Bible* (1981), Vernon White, *Identity* (2002), and various writings of Dietrich Bonhoeffer.

The Limitations of the Study

Substantial work has been done on the theology of reconciliation and therefore our purpose in chapter one is not to provide depth of detail, nor to prove every aspect of the theology but to set out the *prima facie* case for a generally accepted framework for a theology of reconciliation, and then to map out and emphasise its importance in the theology of mission. In this chapter we limit our focus to Paul, firstly because 'reconciliation' is a key motif in his theology, but essentially because it is in the Pauline writings that ethnic reconciliation between Jew and Gentile is emphasised. This is not to deny that there are

foundations to the themes of peace and reconciliation in the Old Testament, or that they are insignificant in the non-Pauline parts of the New Testament. We do briefly set the theme of reconciliation in a canonical context, with particular reference to the ministry and teaching of Jesus.

The survey questionnaire which forms the basis of the research in chapter three was limited to particular Protestant churches in Malaysia. Methodist, Presbyterian, Sidang Injil Borneo (SIB)¹⁵ and Pentecostal (Assemblies of God and Full Gospel Assembly) churches were chosen to provide a cross-section of Malaysian Protestant communities. In terms of Christian tradition, the Methodists and Presbyterians represent Protestant mainline churches. The Assemblies of God (AoG) and Full Gospel Assembly (FGA) churches can be identified as Pentecostal and Independent.¹⁶ The Sidang Injil Borneo, the largest indigenous denomination in Malaysia, identifies itself as Evangelical and has been significantly influenced by Pentecostal and Charismatic movements.¹⁷ The Methodists and Presbyterians trace their beginnings in Malaysia back to 1885 and 1881 respectively. While the Full Gospel Assembly church emerged in the 1980s, distinctively Pentecostal groups arrived in Malaysia in the 1930s, and the SIB was officially formed in East Malaysia in 1959, following work begun by Australian missionaries in Sarawak in the 1920s.

¹⁵. The Malay, 'Sidang Injil Borneo', can be rendered in English as 'Evangelical Church of Borneo'.

¹⁶. 'Independent churches' is a category that describes churches that are outside the traditional mainline and ecumenical denominations.

¹⁷. While many churches identify themselves as Pentecostal and/or Charismatic, it is widely acknowledged that many more churches in Asia who do not describe themselves using those terms have been influenced by Pentecostal and Charismatic movements. See for instance Allen Anderson and Edmond Tang (eds), *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia Regnum Studies In Mission: Asian Journal of Pentecostal Studies Series 3* (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 2005). As with the Assemblies of God and Full Gospel Church, the SIB may also be included under the 'Independent' category.

Our choice of churches provides a sample of mainline Protestant, Evangelical, and Pentecostal / Charismatic denominations. These represent a variety of ecclesiastical traditions, a spectrum of theological emphases, allow for a range of geographical locations throughout East and West Malaysia, and for the questionnaire to be used in a number of linguistic and ethnic settings.¹⁸ This sample of churches was chosen, as far as possible, to reflect the views of evangelical Malaysian Christians.¹⁹ This is known as 'Purposive Sampling', meaning that the researcher uses his or her best judgement in selecting a sample for investigation.

The Structure of the Study

Chapter one begins by setting out a *prima facie* case for the doctrine of reconciliation. A theological framework is established by analysing the main contours of the doctrine as it is found in the New Testament. We consider the view that reconciliation may be seen as the organising principle for understanding salvation in the New Testament. The important place that reconciliation now holds in the theology of mission is explored and special

¹⁸ Statistics quoted in chapter three are taken from four main sources: (1) The World Christian Database: Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary; (2) the Methodist Church in Malaysia; (3) the Sarawak office of the SIB; (4) the office of the 2006 Vice-Moderator of the Presbyterian Church in Malaysia. For a discussion on the reliability of Malaysian statistics and their sources see Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Responses to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches*, Studia Missionalia Svecana XCXVI (Lund: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2004), 102-114.

¹⁹ 'Evangelicalism' is a theological position which, as Geoffrey W. Grogan explains, "treats the evangel, the gospel, the good news of Jesus crucified for our sins and risen again, as the centre from which the whole Christian faith is to be viewed. It should be distinguished from 'evangelism', which is an activity, the proclamation of that gospel. To say that is not by any means to downgrade evangelism, rather it is to emphasise its importance, for it is a major implication, in fact a major imperative, of the embracing of evangelical theology." 'Evangelical' is also characterised by "a consistently high view of the authority of holy Scripture." Geoffrey W. Grogan, *The Faith Once Entrusted to the Saints? Engaging with issues and trends in evangelical theology* (Nottingham: IVP, 2010), 14. The British historian of evangelicalism, David Bebbington, has categorised evangelicalism under four '-isms': "*conversionism*, the belief that lives need to be changed; *activism*, the expression of the gospel in effort; *biblicism*, a particular regard for the bible...; *crucicentrism*, a stress on the sacrifice of Christ on the cross." David Bebbington, *Evangelicalism in Modern Britain. A History from the 1730s to the 1980s* (London: Routledge, 2002), 3.

attention is given in chapter one to understanding the social implications of the doctrine.

With the theological framework in place we proceed to the historical context of Malaysia in order to understand the present day issues surrounding the themes of race, ethnicity and the quest for integration. Chapter two shows why it is that Malaysian churches can often be associated with Malaysia's colonial past and feel threatened by the process of Islamisation. The historical focus of chapter two also helps us to see why the Malaysian church exists today as a multiethnic community in a divided society.

Following the survey questionnaire of chapter three in which significant areas of agreement and disagreement are grouped and discussed, we return to theology in chapter four with an exposition of seven themes that emerge from chapter three's survey. Into this exposition we bring the writings of Malaysian theologians and church leaders, in whose works we also find treatment of these key themes. One theme, that of identity, cuts across all the others, and chapter four therefore concludes by underlining its special importance for the thesis as a whole.

In the concluding chapter we take up the theme of identity and argue for its theological priority in the Malaysian context. The substance of human identity is examined and we look at the ways in which human personhood corresponds to divine personhood, before surveying Christian identity in terms of its historical, relational and ecclesial dimensions. For Malaysian churches to exercise a reconciling presence in their society we argue that there must be the shaping of an ethos of peacemaking and that this ethos is created through an understanding of what constitutes Christian identity. Our final section draws on the works of Dietrich Bonhoeffer in offering concluding, brief perspectives on identity and peace.

The Personal Dimensions of the Study

The topic for this thesis finds its roots in the author's experience of growing up in Northern Ireland where churches faced the challenge of exercising a reconciling presence in a deeply divided and violent society. In that context I saw how a limited and narrow understanding of the theological concept of 'reconciliation' hindered the churches in their calling to be peacemakers. Theological studies helped me to see that while indeed reconciliation is at the heart of the gospel, there are accompanying social implications to the doctrine. I then had the privilege of living and working in Malaysia for ten years. In that context I also saw the powerful relevance of the doctrine of reconciliation for a divided and fragmented society. While working in a theological seminary in Malaysia I had the opportunity to explore in depth the themes of reconciliation, peacemaking and identity, and to begin the research that has led to this thesis.

Chapter 1:

The Theology of Reconciliation and its Importance in the Theology of Mission

*Christianity... properly consists in the mystery of the Redeemer, who, uniting in himself the two natures, human and divine, saved men from the corruption of sin in order to reconcile them with God in his divine person.*²⁰

Blaise Pascal

A thesis concerned with the Malaysian church as an agent of reconciliation must at some point lay out a theology of reconciliation. Our method in this thesis leads us to do so in the opening chapter. In subsequent chapters we will look at Malaysia from within this theological framework and give careful consideration to certain specific aspects of the Malaysian context.

Reconciliation: *en vogue* in the Global Context

There is an increasing awareness that we live in what is being described as a "world society".²¹ Territorial spaces are said to be an illusion, with countries no longer able to shut themselves off from the rest of the world.²² Never before has humanity so self-consciously viewed itself as a single entity.²³ Such global societal change has opened up many opportunities for dialogue across cultures. However, globalisation is by no means a straight path to the reconciliation of peoples. As Vinoth Ramachandra observes: "Conflict, rather

²⁰ Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin, 1966), 140 section 449.

²¹ Vinoth Ramachandra, "Global Society: Challenges for Christian Mission," *Anvil* 21, no. 1 (2004): 11. See also Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalisation?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), and William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 2002).

²² Ramachandra, "Global Society", 11.

²³ Leonard Sweet, Brian D. McLaren and Jerry Haselmayer, '*A*' is for Abductive: *The Language of the Emerging Church* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003), 138.

than blending, seems the norm of the day. At the same time as we become aware of our global interdependence, we also experience the erection of new barriers between peoples."²⁴ As the global community continues to come to terms with the effects of globalisation and the threat of global terrorism, many missionaries and church communities find themselves in situations ranging from simmering ethnic tensions to explosive and life-threatening violence. Amongst Christians and politicians alike, the word 'reconciliation' has taken on renewed interest and urgency. "The rhetoric of reconciliation", writes Christoph Schwobel, "is *en vogue* in the present. Not only in the churches but also in political life reconciliation has become one of the key words of current discourse."²⁵

After surveying a number of important events and trends that took place in the 1990s, including the collapse of the Berlin Wall, the emerging effects of globalisation and the growth of HIV/AIDS in Africa, Robert Schreiter summarises the challenges facing the world of the 21st century:

The last decade has made us all keenly aware of the depth and strength of violence in our world today. Prospects in the immediate future do not harbour much hope for change... The rise of terrorism in recent years and the greater awareness of violence across the board, due in part to the reach of the global media, make ending violence and the rebuilding of societies after violence a major priority for the world today... Ten years ago, with the end of major nuclear threat, some people opined that peacemaking might become an obsolete undertaking. No one would say that today... So we now find ourselves with a keen interest in themes like ending violence, peacemaking, and reconciliation.²⁶

^{24.} Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multicultural World* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 10.

^{25.} Christoph Schwobel, "Reconciliation: From Biblical Observations to Dogmatic Reconstruction," in *The Theology of Reconciliation* ed. Colin E. Gunton (London: T. & T. Clark, 2003), 13.

^{26.} Robert Schreiter, "Reconciliation and Peacemaking: The Theology of Reconciliation and Peacemaking for Mission", in *Mission, Violence and Reconciliation* eds. Howard Mellor and Timothy Yates (Sheffield: Cliff College Publishing, 2004), 14.

Others, reflecting on the world post-September 11, believe that in no other time in history has the world "needed a consciousness of common identity"²⁷ so much so that "the concept of 'otherness'" is said to have become "the defining theological issue of our times."²⁸ This has led organisations such as the World Council of Churches' to launch initiatives such as The Decade to Overcome Violence, and the United Nations to declare 2009 as International Year of Reconciliation.²⁹

There is wide agreement therefore on the need for reconciliation. But with such a wide range of groups using the vocabulary of reconciliation, there emerges, inevitably, great diversity about what is meant by it and expected from it. For instance, those seeking to explore the interface between theological and political reconciliation tend to overemphasise the social dimension without sufficient focus on Paul's words to the Corinthians that "God was reconciling the world to himself in Christ..." (2 Corinthians 5:19). John Webster, writing on "The Ethics of Reconciliation", has recently criticised a number of works which seek to emphasise the connection between the divine work of reconciliation and the Church's reconciling activity:

These various attempts to articulate the concrescence of soteriology, ecclesiology and moral theology are by no means necessarily lacking on a theology of divine prevenience, for they are often quite explicitly directly against the individualistic moral heroics of modernity, and often root ecclesiology in considerations of the Trinitarian relations in which the Church graciously participates through the work of the Holy Spirit. Nevertheless, they are characteristically less drawn to expansive depiction of the sheer gratuity of God's act of reconciliation, and more commonly offer lengthy accounts of the acts of the Church, sacramental and moral, often

²⁷. Rodney L. Petersen, "Racism, Restorative Justice, and Reconciliation," *Missiology* XXXII, no. 1 (January 2004), 71.

²⁸. Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996), 9.

²⁹. According to the WCC website this is "a global movement that strives to strengthen existing efforts and networks for preventing and overcoming violence, as well as inspire the creation of new ones." www.overcomingviolence.org/en/about-dov.html (accessed 18 May, 2009).

through the idiom of virtues, habits and practices.³⁰

Given that politics as well as theology is used to speak about absolutes and ultimates, their shared vocabulary can lead to conceptual overlap, confusion, or worse.³¹ Therefore, those wishing to apply the theology of reconciliation to political realities must be clear about what reconciliation is about from the Christian perspective, otherwise, says John de Gruchy, the danger exists of "confusing the genre and ending up in a futile quest that cannot be fulfilled."³² This applies just as much to when Christians are working in reconciliation initiatives in non-Christian or multi-faith contexts. De Gruchy asks: "In a world of many Christianities and many faiths, what is it that we have to say that must be said, and which others might find worth hearing?"³³ In his book *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice*, de Gruchy employs Dietrich Ritschl's categories of primary and secondary level expressions of reconciliation:

At a primary level of expression the content of reconciliation is invisible and undemonstrable; but it can also be stated in the linguistic form of the hopes and recollections of Israel and the early church. For anyone to whom this language is alien, the primary talk of reconciliation also remains incomprehensible and uninteresting. On the level of secondary statement we have the signs set up by believers and the words that comment on them. For their part believers arrive at an insight into a reconciled relationship with God through their perception of the statements and signs on the secondary level...³⁴

^{30.} John Webster, "The Ethics of Reconciliation" in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 110. Webster provides examples which include T. Gorringer, *God's Just Vengeance: Crime, Violence and the Rhetoric of Salvation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996); Miroslav Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness, and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1996); Rowan Williams, *Resurrection: Interpreting the Easter Gospel* (London: Darton, Longman & Todd, 1982); Rowan Williams, "Resurrection and Peace: More On New Testament Ethics" in *On Christian Theology* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000); Walter Wink, *When the Powers Fall: Reconciliation in the Healing of the Nations* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998).

^{31.} John de Gruchy, *Reconciliation: Restoring Justice* (London: SCM, 2002), 15.

^{32.} Ibid, 15.

^{33.} Ibid, 15.

^{34.} Ibid, 18.

It is not altogether clear what is meant here about "the content of reconciliation" being "invisible and undemonstrable". For de Gruchy, faith language about reconciliation "can be highly inappropriate and counter-productive" if used "uncritically or directly attached to political discourse."³⁵ Part of the difficulty, says de Gruchy, "is that the Church's witness to reconciliation relates to a promise that has yet to be fulfilled in social and political terms."³⁶ Perhaps, more simply, we may understand de Gruchy, and his employment of Ritschl, to be distinguishing the principle of the doctrine of reconciliation from its application. In other words, the primary level expression of reconciliation has to do with its underlying doctrine, whereas the secondary level contains those expressions of reconciliation that are worked out in the wider world. We should add however, that the primary level expression of reconciliation need not, indeed should not, be incomprehensible and uninteresting if it is properly contextualized and centred in the biblical drama of redemption which centres on the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ.

Christian churches have the twofold task of proclamation and engagement:

The challenge in speaking about reconciliation from a Christian perspective is not simply that of proclaiming primary expressions of reconciliation, but engaging in public life in ways that make God's gift of reconciliation and Christian hope a reality through secondary expressions.³⁷

In his book *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics*, Willard Swartley makes observations on "the contemporary church's peace witness" which may also be true of the way churches understand and apply reconciliation. Those who engage in peacebuilding, according to Swartley, too often base their work and witness "not in Scripture but in general cultural notions of justice and fairness." Meanwhile, Christians with a high view of the Bible's authority "react by criticising peace

^{35.} Ibid, 18.

^{36.} Ibid, 18.

^{37.} Ibid, 19.

and justice proponents and then put peace and peacemaking on discount, regarding it secondary, perhaps even unimportant, to the evangelistic mission of the church."³⁸

Swartley believes that when the key New Testament texts are examined, they point to a biblical unity between evangelism and peacemaking. He therefore issues a call for Christian leaders to "seek a holistic gospel of Jesus Christ, with peacemaking, reconciliation, and associated NT emphases guiding our theology and moral praxis."³⁹

Attempts to articulate a holistic understanding of reconciliation have until recently been hard to find. It is difficult to avoid the dichotomous language that refers to the vertical and horizontal aspects of reconciliation. Haddon Willmer reminds us that "the distinction is no more than a tool of analysis in the attempt to understand an integral reality which is not to be parcelled out."⁴⁰ It is largely the case, however, that theologians and missiologists have not tended to explore the social implications of the doctrine of reconciliation particularly for the church in its mission to the wider world. It is generally found that where the theology of reconciliation is examined the emphasis falls on the restoring of the vertical relationship between the individual person and God. For instance, the well known New Testament scholar, Leon Morris, contributed the article on 'Reconciliation' in *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, published in 1973. Whilst noting that some scholars do see a place for the horizontal dimension, Morris places firm emphasis on the priority of reconciliation with God and devotes the bulk of his article to this aspect.⁴¹ Although this is

³⁸. Willard Swartley, *Covenant of Peace: The Missing Peace in New Testament Theology and Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2006), 7.

³⁹. Ibid, 8.

⁴⁰. Haddon Willmer, "'Vertical' and 'Horizontal' in Paul's Theology of Reconciliation in the Letter to the Romans" in *Transformation* 24 (October, 2007), 151.

⁴¹. Leon Morris, "Reconciliation," *Baker's Dictionary of Christian Ethics*, ed. Carl F. Henry (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1973), 567-568.

a work published almost 40 years ago, this chapter will show that things have not moved on substantially. Whether Morris and others are correct to prioritise in this way will be considered in a later section where we give fuller consideration to what is entailed in the horizontal aspect of reconciliation, and what the social implications of the doctrine might be for the church's wider witness. Before that we must be clear about the meaning of the word 'reconciliation' in the New Testament and its place in the theology of Paul.

The Meaning of 'Reconciliation'

Paul is the only New Testament writer to use reconciliation in a theological sense to describe the cross. The verb καταλλάσσω is used six times by Paul (Rom. 5:10; 1 Cor. 7:11; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19, 20). Only one of these (1 Cor. 7:11) is used in the context of an interpersonal relationship, between husband and wife, while the other occurrences refer to humanity's relationship with God. The noun καταλλαγή occurs four times (Rom. 5:11; 11:15; 2 Cor. 5:18, 19), and the verb ἀποκαταλλάσσω is found in just three places (Eph. 2:16; Col. 1:20, 22), being unique to Paul.⁴²

The classical Greek meaning of the root word ἀλλάσσω, 'to change' or 'exchange', was applied to the exchanging of hostilities for friendship and the restoration of friendship after a dispute. In the New Testament, 'reconciliation' is used to describe "the restoration of a good relationship between enemies."⁴³ Kevin Vanhoozer reminds us that καταλλαγή combines "two Greek words that may be roughly translated '*contra* otherness'," and that this provides us with "a vivid image of reconciliation: to reconcile is to remove the barriers

⁴² We acknowledge here that some scholars take the view that Ephesians and Colossians are deuterio-Pauline documents.

⁴³ H. G. Link and C. Brown, "Reconciliation, Restoration, Propitiation, Atonement" in *The New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology* Vol. 3, ed. Colin Brown (Exeter: Paternoster, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978), 145.

that impede fellowship."⁴⁴ John de Gruchy tells us that Paul's use of the word καταλλαγή to describe salvation was translated as *reconciliatio* in the Latin Vulgate and that by the fourteenth century it could be found in English in the writings of Chaucer, describing the reconciling of people.⁴⁵ The Church at this time was using the word to describe the restoring of peace with God and with one another and this is the meaning reflected in the King James Version of the Bible. By the seventeenth century, 'reconciliation' was used in a number of ways:

Amongst these was restoring someone to favour, reconciling penitents to the Church, purification of sacred objects such as church buildings after their desecration, overcoming the estrangement of married partners, or simply the act of reaching agreement.⁴⁶

In today's world reconciliation can now be used in a host of contexts including the reconciling of oneself to a particular set of circumstances, or the reconciling of financial accounts. And in those places where people enjoy relative peace and stability, reconciliation has sometimes become a much diluted concept with little social relevance. It is not uncommon to hear the vocabulary of reconciliation used with a sentimental 'spin' - especially in communities not immediately affected by strife or community tensions.⁴⁷ But even in more gritty contexts, such as in Northern Ireland, the word 'reconciliation' has, for many, suffered over-use. Also known in the Province as the '*R word*', David Porter tells us that reconciliation "has become the 'dirty' word of Northern Ireland politics" - over-used

⁴⁴. Kevin Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the Church: The Company of the Gospel," in *The Futures of Evangelicalism: Issues and Prospects* eds. Craig Bartholomew and Robin Parry (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 83.

⁴⁵. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 24.

⁴⁶. *Ibid*, 24.

⁴⁷. Colin Gunton tells us in his book, *The Actuality of the Atonement*, that he preferred to use the word 'atonement' instead of 'reconciliation' "because *reconciliation* is a word which is overused and often trivialised." *The Actuality of Atonement: A Study of Metaphor, Rationality, and the Christian Tradition* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1988), 177.

and trivialised, it has lost the cutting edge required to address the issues surrounding the shared future of the two main communities.⁴⁸

Therefore, while reconciliation has kept its religious meaning, others have accumulated over time. But since the ministry of reconciliation given to the church involves the twofold task of proclamation and engagement, it is crucial that we recover the biblical meaning of reconciliation. To do this we need to ask how important the doctrine of reconciliation is in the New Testament and what place it occupies in Paul, the only New Testament writer in whom we find the cross described as a work of reconciliation.

How Important is Reconciliation in the New Testament?

A number of classic works have been devoted to the study of reconciliation. Perhaps the greatest of these was from the giant of twentieth century theologians, Karl Barth. *Church Dogmatics* reaches its climax in part four with a treatment of the doctrine of reconciliation, described as "probably the crowning achievement of Barth's mature theology."⁴⁹

Earlier in the 20th century the Scottish theologian James Denney wrote a series of lectures published posthumously in 1917 as *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*. He describes reconciliation as "the central and fundamental experience of the Christian religion... not so much one doctrine as the inspiration and focus of all" doctrines.⁵⁰ In bringing his classic work to a conclusion Denney is convinced that "the centrality and absoluteness of the

⁴⁸. David Porter, "Bearing Witness to the Overcomer of Violence: Reflections from a practitioner theologian in Northern Ireland," in *Mission Violence and Reconciliation* eds. Howard Mellor and Timothy Yates (Sheffield: Cliff College Publishing, 2004), 84.

⁴⁹. David Ford, "Barth, Karl," in *The Blackwell Encyclopaedia of Modern Christian Thought*, ed. Alister E. McGrath (Oxford: Blackwell Publishers, 1993), 32.

⁵⁰. James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1917), 6.

reconciliation achieved by Christ and realised in man through faith make it in the New Testament the basis of far-reaching inferences of every kind."⁵¹ But what Denney saw to be central, other authors and works of theology have seen as peripheral, and in some cases hardly worth a mention! Howard Marshall's response to the omission of an article on 'reconciliation' in the *Anchor Bible Dictionary*, is sufficient to illustrate "the marginalization of this theme in major reference works..."

With 6000 pp. to play with, the compilers could evidently find no room in volume 5, in between entries on such central themes of the Bible as "Rechabites" and "Recorder" (p. 633), for any mention of reconciliation; there is not even a cross-reference to some other article that would include the topic.⁵²

A similar situation is found in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology* where reconciliation occupies limited space under "Forgiveness" and in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters* where it is included within the article on "Peace".⁵³

But from famine we turn to feast, specifically when the theme of reconciliation is laid out by Peter Stuhlmacher as the "theological and critical centre" not just of New Testament Theology but of the whole Bible.⁵⁴ And in Ralph P. Martin's work we find another scholar who assigns a central place to reconciliation, though he limits this centrality to the confines of Pauline theology. In *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology*, the following proposition is made:

Reconciliation... can be presented as an interpretative key to Paul's theology; and if we are pressed to suggest a simple term that summarises his message, the word

^{51.} Ibid, 330.

^{52.} I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (London / Colorado Springs / Hyderabad: Paternoster, 2007), 100.

^{53.} R. W. Yarbrough in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, eds. T. D. Alexander and B. S. Rosner (Leicester / Downers Grove: IVP, 2000), 498-503; S. E. Porter in *Dictionary of Paul and his Letters*, eds. G. F. Hawthorne, R. P. Martin and D. G. Reid (Downers Grove / Leicester: IVP, 1993), 695-699.

^{54.} P. Stuhlmacher, *Historical Criticism and Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Towards a Hermeneutic of Consent* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977), 90-91.

reconciliation will be the 'chief theme' or 'centre' of his missionary and pastoral thought and practice.⁵⁵

Martin argues that in Paul's teaching we find

a distinct shift... from treating reconciliation as the operation of impersonal forces or other-worldly processes (as in gnosticism) to Paul's firm anchoring of its operation in the realm of personal relationships both Godward and as involving men and women in society.⁵⁶

A third scholar has recently argued for the centrality and relevance of reconciliation. In his recent book, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the reconciling of God and humanity*, Howard Marshall argues that reconciliation should occupy a central position in New Testament theology.⁵⁷ The case these scholars present deserves closer inspection: is reconciliation the organising principle to describe salvation in the New Testament?

The Case for Reconciliation as the Organising Principle to Describe Salvation

An understanding of the cross in terms of reconciliation is found particularly in those New Testament passages that use the word group καταλλάσσω, ἀποκαταλλάσσω. Marshall examines 2 Corinthians 5:17-21, Romans 5:10-11; Colossians 1:19-23, and Ephesians 2, arguing that enough is said in these passages to allow reconciliation to be seen as a central motif in Paul's theology.⁵⁸ Strengthening his case, two New Testament word-groups are explored - 'peace' and 'forgiveness'. The 'peace' word-group is found approximately 100 times in the New Testament. It is a broad term for what we have come to understand by 'salvation' - a summary word for all the benefits respondents to the gospel receive and enjoy. The use of the term 'peace' in the New Testament is influenced by the Pax Romana,

^{55.} Ralph P. Martin, *Reconciliation: A Study of Paul's Theology* (London: Marshal, Morgan and Scott, 1981), 5.

^{56.} Ibid, 6.

^{57.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 101.

^{58.} While it is acknowledged that some scholars regard Ephesians and Colossians as deutero-Pauline, I am convinced by those who argue for Pauline authorship of both letters.

but more importantly, by the Old Testament background of 'shalom'. Among the Gospel writers, Luke is particularly interested to explicate the theme of 'peace', so that "the principal effect of Jesus' coming is to make peace possible", with its blessings especially directed towards the oppressed.⁵⁹ In Paul, the terms peace and reconciliation often occur in the same passage. They are closely associated in Romans 5:1-11, Colossians 1:15-22, and Ephesians 2:14-18. "Like 'reconciliation'", says Martin, "*eirene* is a relational term and is its synonym."⁶⁰ The way they operate in parallel to each other is illustrated from Romans 5:1-11:

Justified
yet 'we have peace with God' (v 1)
Justified
yet 'we are reconciled to God' (v 10)⁶¹

Furthermore, we should not dismiss the significance of the inclusion of peace in the formal greetings and benedictions of Paul's letters. Of particular note is the way Paul makes use of the phrase, "God of peace", which, Swartley tells us, can be found "seven times in Paul, once in Hebrews, and only once outside the NT, in *Testament of Dan* 5:2."⁶² Four out of the seven occurrences of "God of peace" are found in Paul's benedictions and Swartley believes this description of God's character, rather than "God of wrath" or "God of judgement" (titles which are not found in Paul) "is a key to his larger theology, for his central doctrinal emphases are much associated with peacemaking."⁶³ When Paul accompanies the moral imperative to the Corinthians to "live in peace" with the assurance that the "God of love and peace" will be with them, this, writes Swartley, is evidence of "a synergistic relation between God's empowerment and human responsibility" and that such

⁵⁹. Marshall, *Aspects*, 109.

⁶⁰. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 139.

⁶¹. Ibid, 141.

⁶². Swartley, *Covenant*, 208.

⁶³. Ibid, 210.

"interplay between human action and God's initiative is implied in all the benediction blessings."⁶⁴ Peace, then, is a concept full of vitality and meaning, and Marshall underlines four aspects of its usage in Paul: it is "an all encompassing term for salvation", it refers to "what God creates for those oppressed by their enemies", it highlights the fact that before peace came there was enmity, and peace is a fruit of the Spirit's work.⁶⁵ We can see, therefore, that in the New Testament peace is closely connected to reconciliation. Peace with God results in what is best encapsulated by the Old Testament term 'shalom', and this translates into a peacemaking attitude towards others. For Swartley at least, "Paul's gospel, from beginning to end, is a gospel of peace and reconciliation."⁶⁶

In exploring the forgiveness word-group, Marshall concentrates on two parables in Luke's Gospel - firstly that of the wayward son (Luke 15:11-32), described as "the classic example of forgiveness and reconciliation", and secondly, the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector (Luke 18:1-14), in which we find "an actual example of divine-human reconciliation, not an earthly story to be interpreted in divine-human terms (in the way the Prodigal Son is to be interpreted)."⁶⁷ The Tax Collector prays for mercy, receives it, and returns home justified, reconciled to God. With its combined themes of mercy, justification and reconciliation, this story can be read in parallel with, and seen as a striking example of, Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5.

^{64.} Ibid, 211.

^{65.} Ibid, 112-113.

^{66.} Ibid, 211.

^{67.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 117.

We might add to Marshall here by noting how, as vivid pictures of reconciliation, the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son find their parallels in the words of Paul to the Romans where he describes how God demonstrates his love to us in that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8), and in Ephesians where the Gentiles are reminded that "those who once were far off" have been "brought near" (2:13). In volume 4 of his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth explores the doctrine of reconciliation using the story of the prodigal son. The journey into the 'far country' describes the journey of the Son of God in terms of humiliation and exaltation. Barth describes the humiliation and exaltation of Jesus as two aspects of the one reconciling action. The glory of Christ's deity is demonstrated in his humiliation, and his true humanity is restored through his exaltation. In Barth's words,

That Jesus Christ is very God is shown in his way into the far country in which he the Lord became a servant. For in the majesty of the true God it happened that the eternal Son of the eternal Father became obedient by offering and humbling Himself to be the brother of man, to take his place with the transgressor, to judge him by judging Himself and dying in his place. But God the Father raised Him from the dead, and in so doing recognised and gave effect to His death and passion as a satisfaction made for us...⁶⁸ Made sin for us, he stands in our place. He represents us in that which we truly are...⁶⁹

David Wenham sees a link between Jesus and Paul in terms of interpersonal relationships:

As for Paul's teaching about barriers being broken down between human beings, this is anticipated in Jesus' own conduct, in mixing, for example, with socially marginalised groups, including tax collectors and women, but also in his teaching about love for enemies and Samaritans.⁷⁰

New Testament scholarship has had its fair share of those attempting to widen the gap between Jesus and Paul. With this in mind, Ralph Martin devotes the final chapter of his study on reconciliation to demonstrating how "Paul's message of reconciliation" has an

⁶⁸. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* 4.1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 157.

⁶⁹. Ibid, 241.

⁷⁰. David Wenham, *Paul: Follower of Jesus or Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 61.

"essential oneness with Jesus' total impact..."⁷¹ As far as Martin is concerned, the New Testament theme of reconciliation is a "shared ingredient in both Jesus' and Paul's ministry."⁷²

Returning to Marshall, his analysis of various New Testament passages provides "sufficient material to see the wide scope of the motif of reconciliation". The survey of the 'peace' and 'forgiveness' word-groups significantly increases "the amount of overt language regarding divine-human reconciliation".⁷³ But the question remains, does reconciliation occupy a central position in New Testament theology? The answer to this depends on how reconciliation relates to other pictures of salvation in the Bible.

Reconciliation and Other Pictures of Salvation

God's saving work in Christ is described variously by Paul as 'salvation', 'redemption', 'deliverance', 'justification', as well as 'reconciliation'. Brought together, all these "form an indissoluble whole."⁷⁴ But can reconciliation be seen in any way as an overarching concept within Paul's theology? Martin and Marshall believe it can. To establish this belief Marshall takes a canonical perspective to show, in the broadest possible terms, that the concept of reconciliation is foundational to the overall biblical drama. He argues that throughout its grand narrative, the Bible presupposes humanity's problem of sin and rebellion, and what God does to bring about "the process of change from a worse situation

⁷¹. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 223-224.

⁷². Ibid, 224.

⁷³. Marshall, *Aspects*, 118.

⁷⁴. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 45.

to a better."⁷⁵ This process is referred to in the Bible using a number of concepts, and yet, argues Marshall, when the framework of biblical teaching is set out, the concept of reconciliation fits the overall pattern at each stage. We here summarise Marshall's eight points:

1. A relationship of harmony existed between God and his creation.
2. Disharmony and enmity resulted when people turned from God in disobedience.
3. People are the enemies of God and are under the judgement of God which is being worked out now and fully in the future, final judgement.
4. Into this situation of enmity Jesus comes, and through his death God brings about reconciliation.
5. The message of reconciliation is now to be made known and the invitation made for people to turn from sin and be reconciled with God.
6. People must choose to respond in faith. If they reject the offer of forgiveness they remain enemies of God.
7. Those who respond to the gospel invitation are embraced into the people of God - the "peaceable community" - the church.
8. Those who refuse to be reconciled will be rejected by God at the final judgement.⁷⁶

Marshall looks at other models of salvation, particularly those found in Paul, to see their connection to reconciliation. The aim "is to show that these (models) are similar in structure to the motif of reconciliation and often closely linked with it, but that reconciliation may well be the most comprehensive and the most apt of the models that are used."⁷⁷ The models Marshall identifies are justification, redemption, salvation, then sacrifice, the family, and finally, covenant. All these in various ways describe what was accomplished by Christ's death and each, asserts Marshall, "fits the formal pattern... found to be exemplified in reconciliation to a greater or less extent."⁷⁸ It is acknowledged that no single picture provided by the New Testament writers can adequately tell the fullness of

⁷⁵. Marshall, *Aspects*, 118.

⁷⁶. Marshall admits to over-simplification, but the aim is to demonstrate "the essential elements that form the common framework of biblical teaching." He also acknowledges that in stating these points in such an abstract way, he is omitting important details and failing to "express the characteristically biblical, Jewish-Christian form of the story." Marshall, *Aspects*, 119.

⁷⁷. Marshall, *Aspects*, 120.

⁷⁸. *Ibid*, 127.

Christ's saving work, and "the concept of reconciliation does not explicitly contain every element of the total picture."⁷⁹ Yet Marshall has built a strong case to argue that "the concept of reconciliation (including peace and forgiveness) is pretty comprehensive, that the motif is widespread, and that the rationale underlies both Pauline thought in particular, and New Testament thought generally."⁸⁰ The explicit theme of reconciliation with its specific word group may not be found in abundance in the New Testament, but Marshall believes it gives us "the organising principle, the underlying concept, that enables us to perceive some unity and harmony in the range of other models and motifs used to describe the salvation of God and the way in which he effects it."⁸¹

In summary, we can say that although the doctrine of reconciliation is surprisingly absent from a number of theological reference works, it can be clearly seen as a distinctively Pauline concept. Paul is the only New Testament writer to use the word to describe God's saving work, and there are sufficient grounds for saying that reconciliation goes to the heart of the gospel and is central to Christianity, as far as the Apostle is concerned. Commenting on 2 Corinthians 5:18-21 and "the word (*ho logos*) of reconciliation", Graham Stanton points out that "Paul often uses 'the word' synonymously with 'the gospel', so we need not doubt that reconciliation is a central strand in Paul's gospel."⁸²

⁷⁹. Ibid, 128.

⁸⁰. Ibid, 129.

⁸¹. Ibid, 130-131. Responding to the claim of some that there is an inherent disunity among the key metaphors for God's saving work in the New Testament, Henri Blocher writes "On the contrary, coordinating them appears to be an effortless task: they fittingly complement each other; they exhibit the same structure (isomorphism), so that they naturally translate into one another - hence the intertwining in so many passages." Henri Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors and the doctrine of the Atonement", *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society* Vol. 47, no 4 (December 2004): 643-644.

⁸². Graham N. Stanton, "Paul's Gospel," in *The Cambridge Companion to St. Paul*, ed. James D. G. Dunn (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), 181.

A Note on the Use of Metaphor

The New Testament writers use a variety of words to express Christ's work of atonement.

We find terms like 'propitiation', 'redemption', 'justification' and 'reconciliation'. These images aid us in our understanding of the atonement, and by employing emphases within and among these images theologians have expressed various theories of salvation.

However, John Stott cautions against using the term 'theories', and recommends 'images' as a better term because images point to "concrete pictures and belong to the data of revelation" whereas theories tend to imply something more "abstract and speculative."⁸³

Related to this is the way in which certain theologians refer to aspects of biblical salvation as 'metaphors'. It is plainly the case that the New Testament uses metaphorical language to describe the life and work of Christ. John de Gruchy tells us that "Scripture and Christian tradition employ a range of metaphors, symbols and words to express God's saving activity in the world."⁸⁴ However, because of linguistic and philosophical trends and the rise of the social sciences and their influence in Western thought, 'metaphor' can be taken to mean something purely symbolic, where the emphasis falls on form rather than content, so that metaphors may or may not convey truth. When applied to the theology of atonement, this understanding of metaphor makes possible the emphasising of some and the marginalising of other biblical metaphors which speak of God's saving work. Henri Blocher is critical of such approaches, noting the influence on hermeneutics of Paul Ricoeur's *metaphorical truth*, and the way in which a theologian such as Colin Gunton, for example, "has imbibed much Romantic influence... and distrusts conceptual clarity."⁸⁵ Blocher continues:

Not a few put forward the metaphorical character of atonement language in Scripture to unsettle or even dismantle the classical Protestant orthodox doctrine of

⁸³. John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986), 168.

⁸⁴. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 44.

⁸⁵. Blocher, "Biblical Metaphors", 633.

this locus, with its central emphasis on penal substitution.⁸⁶

Biblical writers did not handle the main 'metaphors' for atonement as if they were, in their estimate, inadequate images - images they had to borrow from their cultural context while 'struggling' to express an impenetrable mystery. They found in them sources of light, on God's action, for believing intelligence. They were confident the various representations had direct doctrinal cash value.⁸⁷

This thesis takes the view that each Scriptural metaphor is important and necessary, and all convey truth.

Reconciliation in Canonical Context

As an explicit theme in terms of word group usage (καταλλάσσω, ἀποκαταλλάσσω) 'reconciliation' does not figure highly in statistical terms, but as a concept, or motif, we find that reconciliation is not limited to Paul but is widespread in the New Testament. It has been argued, for example by Marshall, that 'reconciliation' operates as an organising principle connecting all models that explain and illustrate the salvation of God.⁸⁸ Indeed, for scholars such as Marshall and Stuhlmacher, the theme of reconciliation is foundational to the overall biblical drama.

With this in mind, we should pause to consider the theme of reconciliation within the broader biblical context. This chapter is largely focused on the New Testament and within it, the Pauline letters. We are deliberately limiting ourselves to Paul not simply for the reason that 'reconciliation' is a central motif in the apostle's theology, but essentially because it is within those Pauline writings that reconciliation between Jew and Gentile is so thoroughly explored - and this is an emphasis of special relevance to our thesis.

⁸⁶. Ibid, 630.

⁸⁷. Ibid, 641.

⁸⁸. This raises interesting questions about the relationship of biblical language both to biblical and to systematic theology, but we are unable to enter into these questions in this thesis.

Paul's theology of reconciliation is a biblical theology, for at the heart of God's mission is the healing of the relationship broken in Eden. The promise of restoration begins with more than a hint in Genesis 3:15, and clearly from the call of Abraham in chapter 12. God's saving purpose has always been the creation of a people who will know him and be known by him (Gen. 12:1-3; 17:7; cf. Jer. 31:33). The promise that "I will be their God and they will be my people" echoes through the Bible and climaxes in its final book. There we find the great reconciled multitude in Revelation 7:9 "from every nation, tribe, people and language", and the promise of 21:3 that "They will be his people, and God himself will be with them and be their God". And all this is part of God's ultimate purpose: "the healing of the nations" (22:2).

Our extended focus on Paul should not diminish the importance of the theme of reconciliation in the ministry of Jesus. Ralph Martin has reminded us that the ministries of Jesus and Paul contain the shared ingredient of reconciliation. There is divine-human reconciliation in the parable of the Pharisee and the Tax Collector, and striking pictures of reconciliation in the parables of the Lost Sheep and the Prodigal Son. However, if we were to give more focused attention to the theme of reconciliation in the Gospels we might turn to those verses where God's eschatological forgiveness of us is apparently conditional on our forgiveness of others. The importance of forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus is seen, for instance, in the parable of the unforgiving servant in Matthew 18:23-35. For Matthew, true discipleship is demonstrated in a person's willingness to forgive others, and such willingness is connected to God's eschatological forgiveness of him or her (18:35). Earlier in the fifth petition of the prayer Jesus taught his disciples (Matt. 6:12), both present and eschatological forgiveness is linked to our forgiveness of others. And this is explicitly emphasised in verses 14-15: "For if you forgive others when they sin against you, your

heavenly Father will also forgive you. But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins." The themes of reconciliation and forgiveness are perhaps most clearly connected in Matthew 5:23-24, where the need for reconciliation is so important that only when it has been made can a gift be offered at the altar: "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to that person; then come and offer your gift." Commenting on the relationship between reconciliation and forgiveness in the teaching of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount, Donald Hagner has this to say: "Thus, the recipient of the grace of the kingdom is one who initiates and seeks reconciliation, both with members of the community of faith and with adversaries (cf. 5:9)."⁸⁹

The Main Contours of Reconciliation in Paul

If we wish to see reconciliation as the "organising principle"⁹⁰ for describing the salvation of God, or as the "controlling metaphor"⁹¹ for the way Paul expresses the gospel, it will be important for us to set out, albeit briefly, the main contours of the doctrine as we find it expressed in the Apostle's writings. In Paul, the doctrine moves in two directions simultaneously. We are led to the heart of the gospel itself, discovering through the image of reconciliation what the gospel is and has achieved. At the same time the doctrine leads us to the outer boundaries of the gospel, as Paul explicates how reconciliation should be worked out in the everyday realities of life and relationships; how the doctrine transforms

⁸⁹. Donald Hagner, *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 1-13* (Dallas: Word Books, 1993), 118.

⁹⁰. Marshall, *Aspects*, 130.

⁹¹. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 45.

the reconciled into new people and communities. Several things become clear from Paul's presentation of reconciliation.

Reconciliation is Needed Because of the Alienating Effects of Sin

As a result of sin, humanity is alienated from God. Several passages in the Pauline letters state this clearly. For instance, although Paul's purpose for using reconciliation language in 1 Corinthians 5 is primarily pastoral, verse 19 refers to the sins of humanity not being counted against them. Clearer still are Paul's words in Romans 5:6-11, where the whole of humanity are described as *ungodly... sinners...* and as *enemies* of God, that is, actively hostile to God. Similarly in Colossians 1:21, alienation from God is linked to sin.

Therefore, as N. T. Wright points out:

It is not simply that habitual wrongdoings has turned the mind away from God. Nor is the word translated 'mind' (*dianoia*) strictly the mind itself, but the way it works, the processes of understanding and intellect. Thought and act are both tainted, each pushing the other into further corruption...⁹²

Having been created to enjoy a "covenantal relationship of companionship and co-operation with God, with one another, and in harmony with nature"⁹³ sin has broken these relationships so that humanity in its entirety "is somehow out of order."⁹⁴ For Barth, our understanding of the effects of sin cannot be softened or diminished: "The fact that Jesus Christ died totally for the reconciliation of every man... means decisively that this corruption is both radical and total... that the consequent sinful perversion then extends to the whole of his being without exception."⁹⁵ Barth captures the wretchedness of the human condition, in which "the whole man... is caught in this turning away from God and has to

⁹². N. T. Wright, *Colossians and Philemon*, Tyndale New Testament Commentaries (Leicester: IVP; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 81.

⁹³. de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, 48.

⁹⁴. N. T. Wright, *Colossians*, 81.

⁹⁵. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV part 1 (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), 492.

exist as turned away from Him... Man is what he does. And he does what he is. And in the circle of his being and activity he lives in this turning away - backwards and forwards from sin to sin."⁹⁶ Since the fall, there is no "relic or core or goodness which persists in man in spite of his sin."⁹⁷ Simply put, and expressing the heart and soul of the *Pensées*, are the words of Pascal: "For the Christian faith consists almost wholly in establishing these two things: The corruption of nature and the redemption of Christ."⁹⁸ For reconciliation to happen, the barrier of sin must be removed.

Reconciliation Begins with God

The sinful state of humanity makes it impossible for any human to do anything to reconcile themselves with God. Our powerlessness is demonstrated in the fact that *while we were still sinners, Christ died for us* (Rom. 5:8). The initiative of God in the work of reconciliation is emphasised three times in 2 Corinthians 5, in verses 18, 19 and 21. Sinfulness brings humanity under the judgement of God. Alienated from God because of sin, humanity has neither the power to remove the enmity, nor the desire to do so. It is through God's gracious initiative that he himself takes steps to remove the cause of his wrath against us and restore us to fellowship with himself. He thus satisfies his own justice and removes the obstacle of sin, the root of our estrangement. Graham Stanton notes the contribution of S. R. Porter who

has recently shown that Paul is the first attested Greek author to speak of the offended party (God) initiating reconciliation, using the verb in the active voice. As with a number of his key words and phrases (including 'gospel'), Paul has taken a concept familiar in the Greek world of his day and filled it with 'biblical' content.⁹⁹

^{96.} Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV part 1, 492.

^{97.} Ibid, 492-494.

^{98.} Blaise Pascal, *Pensées* (London: Penguin, 1966), 131 section 427.

^{99.} Graham N. Stanton, "Paul's Gospel", 181.

Marshall reminds us that when Paul writes about reconciliation, "the passive form of the verb is not used with God as the subject... Nor is the active form used with God as the object."¹⁰⁰ We never read that Christ reconciled the Father to us. It is God who takes the initiative in the reconciling work. However, Marshall elsewhere points out that the language of reconciliation presupposes a situation of mutual enmity between God and the unreconciled.¹⁰¹ Similarly, Stott, while noting the same grammatical facts concerning the usage of the word group καταλλάσσω in the New Testament, believes that linguistic usage should not necessarily direct theological understanding.¹⁰² In Stott's view, "the barrier between God and us" was not "entirely on our side," meaning that God needed to be reconciled to us just as much as we needed to be reconciled to God: "The wall or barrier between God and us was constituted both by our rebellion against him and by his wrath upon us on account of our rebellion."¹⁰³ It is on the basis of propitiation made for sin through Christ's suffering and death that we can say that God is reconciled to humanity. There is no conflict here between justice and mercy, nor between propitiation and love.

James Denney puts it well:

In the experience of forgiveness, as a matter of fact, not only are we reconciled to God, but God is reconciled to us. He is not reconciled in the sense that something is won from him for us against his will, but in the sense that his will to bless us is realised, as it was not before, on the basis of what Christ has done, and of our appropriation of it.¹⁰⁴

^{100.} I. Howard Marshall, "The Meaning of 'Reconciliation'," in Guelich, 122.

^{101.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 48.

^{102.} Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 197.

^{103.} *Ibid*, 197-198.

^{104.} James Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 238. Some scholars do not accept the view that the propitiation made for sin through the death of Christ means that we may talk of God being reconciled to humanity as well as humanity being reconciled to God. For discussion on this see J. D. G. Dunn, *The Theology of Paul the Apostle* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 1998); Nigel Wright, *The Radical Evangelical: Seeking a Place to Stand*, (London: SPCK, 1996); John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1986); Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross* (Leicester: IVP, 2001). There has been some dissatisfaction among some evangelicals with the notion of penal substitution. This coincides with notable shifts of emphasis from retributive to more restorative models of justice, from less legal to more relational perspectives on the cross, and from the cross as an act of propitiation to an act of

Reconciliation is Possible Because of the Death of Christ

God's reconciling work could only be achieved through the death of Christ. It was "through the death of his Son" that God reconciled the world to himself (Rom. 5:10). The Ephesians are told that their fellowship with God and the reconciling of Jew and Gentile is made possible "through the blood of Christ" (2:13-16). In 2 Corinthians 5:17-18, Christ is "the agent of God introducing the new era of reconciliation."¹⁰⁵ That "new era" is a result of a real historical event. Paul refers to reconciliation in 2 Corinthians 5 in the past tense: "God *reconciled* us" (18): God *was reconciling* the world to himself in Christ" (19). We notice also a paradox in Paul's words of 2 Corinthians 5:18-19, that God was not only working through Christ, but present in Christ, to accomplish this reconciliation.

On the one hand, God was in Christ reconciling. On the other, God made Christ to be sin for us. How God can have been in Christ when he made him to be sin is the ultimate mystery of the atonement.¹⁰⁶

But this paradox helps us to see the trinitarian foundation to the work of atonement. The Father and the Son act together to accomplish the reconciling mission of God.

Ramachandra, borrowing from Jürgen Moltmann, sees the cross leading us "beyond an abstract monotheism... to a full-blooded trinitarian understanding of ultimate reality." It is at the cross where God's true identity is seen "as the holy and loving Father and as the loving and obedient Son who offers himself in the Holy Spirit for sinful humanity."¹⁰⁷

identification, with Christ preferred as representative rather than as substitute. In recent years dissatisfaction has escalated to controversy, for example, with the publication of S. Chalk and A. Mann, *The Lost Message of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2003) and J. B. Green and M. D. Baker, *Recovering the Scandal of the Cross: Atonement in New Testament and Contemporary Contexts* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000); both books raising serious questions about whether penal substitution is an essential element of Christian doctrine. For a defence of the traditional, orthodox view of penal substitution see D. Peterson (ed.), *Where Wrath and Mercy Meet: Proclaiming the Atonement Today* (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2001), C. E. Hill and F. A. James III (eds), *The Glory of the Atonement: Biblical, Historical and Practical Perspectives* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2004).

¹⁰⁵. Derek Tidball, *The Message of the Cross, The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 222.

¹⁰⁶. Stott, *Cross of Christ*, 201.

¹⁰⁷. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Gods That Fail: Modern Idolatry and Christian Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 203-204.

Trinitarian thinking at this point helps guard against a dangerous misunderstanding surrounding the death of Christ - that God's purposes in redemption required the Son appeasing the Father.¹⁰⁸

In 2 Corinthians 5, Paul uses two idioms to express how the cross has brought about reconciliation. Firstly, in verse 19, he uses forensic language to explain to the Corinthians that reconciliation has taken place because God no longer charges to their accounts debts that are properly theirs: "not counting people's sins against them." The second idiom is a sacrificial one, used in verse 21: "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God." The reality to which both idioms point is an atonement which happens by way of substitution.¹⁰⁹

In his *Church Dogmatics*, Barth argues that reconciliation is not simply a possibility open to individuals who make a personal faith response to Jesus Christ, but should be understood as a reality having already taken place, brought about through the work of Christ. An alteration has already taken place in relation to the human situation. The world has been reconciled to God in Christ. Murray Rae argues similarly: "Reconciliation is not an event or series of events taking place in an isolated and fragmentary way as individual men and women receive Christ and commit themselves to live in communion with God."¹¹⁰ For sure, reconciliation is not something we accomplish - it is God's work, accomplished through the Son. However, while it can be spoken of as an accomplished

¹⁰⁸. Cf. Marshall, *Aspects*, 66.

¹⁰⁹. See Marshall, *Aspects*, 65.

¹¹⁰. Murray Rae, "A Remnant People: The Ecclesia as a Sign of Reconciliation" in *The Theology of Reconciliation*, ed. Gunton, 93.

fact, it is also true that reconciliation of the world involves, by grace, the human element of response. Care is needed on this point, for some may read Paul's words in 2 Corinthians 5:19, that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself" and conclude that humanity as a whole have now been reconciled to God and the task of the church is to inform the world of what has already happened. Such a reading would miss a clear part of Paul's message in the same passage, where, along with the proclamation that "God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself", there is the appeal - "Be reconciled to God." Such an appeal would be worthless if those hearing it were already reconciled. These two distinct aspects of proclamation and appeal are held together in the missionary task of God's ambassadors (2 Cor. 5:20). Writing on the topic, "Reconciliation as Realised in Human Life", Denney explains:

It [reconciliation] is not a work, so far, which sinners do, nor which is done in them; it is a finished work which is done for them. The legitimacy and necessity of this point of view it is vain to dispute. No one, however, questions that the finished work of Christ must in some way become effective for sinners - must in some way become a power in their lives - if reconciliation is to be realised in their experience. In other words, it must somehow be mediated to them... We cannot evade it by thinking of the sinner as immediately or unconditionally involved in Christ's work.¹¹¹

And for Marshall, "The total action of reconciliation is thus incomplete until there has been acceptance of God's grace (2 Cor. 6:1) on the human side as men are reconciled to God."¹¹²

It is on the basis of what has already been accomplished on the cross that the appeal is made, and on that same basis that our positive response enables reconciliation to be received. The benefits of that reconciliation, according to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:17, are limited to those who are "in Christ" (17). The work of reconciliation at the cross was a finished work, and yet there still remains a response to be made if we are to be reconciled to God.

¹¹¹. Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 286.

¹¹². Marshall, "The Meaning of Reconciliation", 123.

The Fruit of Reconciliation is Peace

The effect of reconciliation is εἰρήνη (Rom. 5:1). This is a rich biblical concept which involves the establishing of right, harmonious relationships. It encapsulates all the positive connotations of well-being and wholeness. From the perspective of Greek thought, as S. E. Porter points out, " 'peace' is a relational word which speaks of a state of objective well-being, leading to harmonious relations between people or nations."¹¹³ It was noted above that the New Testament's use of peace draws most significantly from the Old Testament background of *shalom*.

Reference has already been made to the work of Willard Swartley. His recent study is a major attempt to place the concept of peace at the heart of the New Testament. Two chapters are devoted to Paul's understanding of peace, and Swartley asserts that

the notion of making peace between humans and God and between formerly alienated humans is so central to the core of Pauline doctrinal and ethical thought that it is impossible to develop a faithful construal of Pauline thought without peacemaking and/or reconciliation at the core.¹¹⁴

Peace and reconciliation with God, and peace and reconciliation with fellow humans, are the twin gifts of the salvation accomplished through the cross of Christ. While Romans 5:1-11 is concerned with peace and reconciliation with God, elsewhere Paul expands the reconciling implications of this to include the reconciling of peoples (Eph. 2:11-22) and the ultimate reconciling of *all things* (Colossians 1:19-20). Paul's "twofold gospel reality", as Swartley points out, is that "*all*, both Jews and Gentiles, are recipients of God's saving righteousness manifest in Jesus Christ, and that by God's grace those who receive this gift will be transformed and liberated from enslaving sin."

¹¹³ S. E. Porter, "Peace, Reconciliation," in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Downers Grove; Leicester: IVP, 1992), 696.

¹¹⁴ Swartley, *Covenant*, 192.

This twofold reality is the salvific substance of peacemaking in Paul. Peace is the fruit of this all-encompassing regeneration, both personally and corporately. Most all of Paul's writings reflect this peace-making breakthrough, peace with God through Christ and peace between former enemies.¹¹⁵

There are clear allusions to Isaiah in what Paul writes in chapter 2 of his letter to the Ephesians. Two texts in particular provide the foundation for Paul's argument. Isaiah 52:7 - "How beautiful on the mountains are the feet of the one who brings good news", is the background to Ephesians 2:17 - "He [Christ] came and preached peace to you...". Further, Isaiah 57:19 - "Peace, peace, to those far and near... And I will heal them...", ties in with the rest of Ephesians 2:17 - "He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near." It is the cross of Christ that creates the new people of God that Paul writes about in Ephesians. Those far away - Gentiles, and those near - Jews, have been brought together in the peace of Christ. Isaiah's duplication of "Peace, peace..." (57:19) "means peace in its full reality and nothing but peace", and the promise of healing (Is. 57:19) is the "complete wholeness that peace implies."¹¹⁶ For Paul, the great vision and hope that these words of Isaiah contain can only be fulfilled in Christ. Commenting on Paul's use of Isaiah 57:19, Swartley writes that "for Paul this peace phrase fits beautifully his own experience of God's expanding kingdom gospel of peace manifest through his apostolic work and mission."¹¹⁷

These twin gifts of peace: peace with God and peace with others, even enemies, are bound up so closely in the New Testament that it is difficult to focus on one without being drawn into the significance of the other. Marshall's words on peace as a fruit of the work of the

¹¹⁵. Ibid, 195.

¹¹⁶. Alec Motyer, *Isaiah: Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 359.

¹¹⁷. Swartley, *Covenant*, 200.

Spirit illustrate this, and provide an apt summary of what has occupied us in the preceding paragraphs:

The line between experiencing peace (Phil. 4:7) and being a person who acts peaceably is hard to draw (cf. Rom. 15:13; Eph. 4:3; Col. 3:15; cf. elsewhere Jas. 3:18; 1 Pet. 3:11). Those who experience divine peace are called to be agents of that peace to others. The concept of peacemaking used of God in Colossians 1:20 is applied to disciples in Matthew 5:9, and the peace bestowed in Ephesians 2 is, at one and the same time, peace with God and between Jews and Gentiles.

As observed above, the fundamental reconciliation of people with God, the resulting transformation of relationships and the experience of peace between people, requires a response to the appeal to "be reconciled to God" (2 Cor. 5:20). And this brings us to a further dimension of reconciliation in Paul: the agency of the Church as the proclaimer of God's reconciliation.

The Church is an Agent of Reconciliation

Paul envisages a community which not only celebrates the achievement of reconciliation and enjoys peace with God having responded to the gospel, but which is also now committed to announcing and embodying the message of reconciliation to the wider world. Says Paul: "he has committed to us the message of reconciliation. We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though Christ were making his appeal through us" (19-20). Reconciliation must now be proclaimed for others to share in it, and Paul is not the only ambassador. He may lead the way, but he is not the only proclaimer: this is now the task of the church. As Tidball describes it, "An unbroken chain down the centuries links many, old and young, women and men, professional and blue-collar, in being his ambassadors."¹¹⁸ In 2 Corinthians 5:20 this is obviously in terms of verbal proclamation, but the message must also be demonstrated in the life and deeds of the church. Here is located one of Paul's primary challenges to the Corinthian Christians. Hopelessly divided among themselves and

¹¹⁸. Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 225.

hostile towards Paul, the message of reconciliation had not sufficiently taken root in their own community. They were not at peace in relation to one another, nor in relation to Paul. This is why Paul pleads for them to "be reconciled to God." They were already Christians but they had to recognise that true reconciliation with God will bring authentic reconciliation with one another. For Paul, the gospel of reconciliation must be seen as well as heard from the Christian community. This was the powerful message of the ethnic reconciliation we read of in the letter to the Ephesians, where ancient divisions between Jew and Gentile are overcome by the gospel of reconciliation. Christ's work of reconciliation is applied to the alienation of the Gentiles from God and the division between Gentiles and Jews. As we have seen, several passages from Isaiah are foundational for what Paul has to say about those once alienated now being "fellow citizens" (19), "foreigners" becoming "members of God's household" (19) and those who "were far away" being "brought near" (13). The outcome was startling: the two great ethnic groups of the ancient world are now brought together through the cross to be the one "new humanity" (15). What brought about this unified church was not only Paul's preaching of the radical message of reconciliation centred on the peacemaking power of the cross, but also the readiness of Jewish and Gentile believers to swim against the socio-political currents of the day and so to suffer for the faith.¹¹⁹

In today's world, increasingly riven by ethnic tension, the relevance of the interpretation of the cross in terms of reconciliation is not difficult to miss. In his book *The Message of The Cross*, Tidball gives an impassioned plea for the relevance of this doctrine for today:

How many more trouble-spots in the world would find the belligerent attitudes of combatants changed, their hostilities ended and their ethnic-cleansing policies done away with, if only they appreciated that the wooden stake erected centuries ago on a hill opposite Jerusalem was set up not merely for the salvation of individuals but

¹¹⁹. See Swartley, *Covenant*, 204.

for the transformation of ethnic relations too?¹²⁰

In the midst of the brokenness and suffering of the world, the church exists as a community of reconciliation, pointing back to the unique reconciling work of God in Christ on the cross, and pointing forward, by its work and witness, to the ultimate reconciliation of "all things". This cosmic dimension (Col. 1:20; Eph. 1:10) is another major component of Paul's doctrine of reconciliation, and we will explore it further in a later section. But one element of its eschatological fulfilment is already present and visible in how the people of God have been redefined and enlarged to include both Jews and Gentiles: "The mystery of cosmic reconciliation finds a preliminary historical proof in the reality of Jews and Greeks gathered round the Lord's table."¹²¹ This is what Andrew Walls describes as "The Ephesian Moment" where "two races and two cultures historically separated by the meal table now met at table to share the knowledge of Christ."¹²² And what we see at work within the early Christian communities in terms of peace and reconciliation, is also expressed outwardly, as Swartley puts it, "in the community's care for the poor and despised of the *plebs urbana*." He writes:

Not only did the Christian community practice mutual aid among its own members, but it sought also to alleviate the horrific socioeconomic poverty conditions of the empire. Early Christianity witnessed to Jesus Christ's victory over the powers by means of the church's incredible practice of charity and mutual aid.¹²³

According to Paul, the church has been entrusted with a message - both an announcement and a proclamation. This is a message to be celebrated not just in worship and praise. As Rae reminds us, it must also involve the church "taking the news of the gospel to its neighbour, to its enemies even, and finally to the ends of the earth." He asserts: "That is what the Church is about: worship, fellowship and mission. All these things arise out of the

¹²⁰. Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 228.

¹²¹. Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the Church", 83.

¹²². Andrew Walls, *The Cross-Cultural Process in Christian History* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 76, 78.

¹²³. Swartley, *Covenant*, 221.

fact, accomplished once and for all, that God was in Christ reconciling the world to himself."¹²⁴

These then are the broad contours of Paul's doctrine of reconciliation. Much more could be said, but the basic framework has been established. Reconciliation is a central strand of Paul's theology, but even what Paul has to say on this can be set within the larger biblical narrative where reconciliation is necessary given humankind's alienation from God because of sin, and where God takes the saving initiative to restore that relationship crucially and climactically through the death of Christ on the cross. Those who accept this reconciliation are restored in their relationship with God, embraced into the community of the church and commissioned to proclaim in word and deed, the good news of reconciliation. In fellowship with God and in service to neighbour, the doctrine of reconciliation shapes the new reality brought about in Christ. This now brings us to consider more specifically what the doctrine of reconciliation means for Christian witness to the wider world.

Mission as Reconciliation

From a Marginal to a Central Theme in Missiology

According to the Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51, "The Mission of God in our fallen, broken world is reconciliation."¹²⁵ However, the understanding of mission as reconciliation has not always been so confidently asserted. For instance, in David Bosch's groundbreaking work *Transforming Mission* (1991), reconciliation is not included in the index

¹²⁴. Rae, "A Remnant People," 106.

¹²⁵. *Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Faithful Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts and Divisions*. Lausanne Occasional Paper No. 51, Pattaya, Thailand, September 29th - October, 5th, 2004 (Lausanne Committee for World Evangelisation, 2004), 11.

and receives only a passing comment in the text to acknowledge it as "a key concept in

Paul."¹²⁶ Writing in 2005, Robert J. Schreiter tells us

There have been references and echoes of the theme of reconciliation in the theological discussion of mission throughout the previous century, but it is only in the last decade and a half that it has emerged as an important way of talking about Christian mission.¹²⁷

Bosch looked forward to "an emerging ecumenical paradigm" of mission. But the global scene was to shift significantly, and events in the decade following the publication of *Transforming Mission* began pointing mission in a different direction (at least in the short term), to that which Bosch had envisaged.

In tracing the rise of reconciliation as a paradigm of mission, Schreiter sketches what he identifies as four earlier paradigms, three of which rose to prominence in the second half of the twentieth century: *proclamation* - the dominant paradigm of the past four hundred years and which continues to be a central aspect of mission;¹²⁸ *dialogue* - the rise of which can be plotted against the numerous inter-religious dialogues that have taken place since the mid-twentieth century, and a paradigm, according to Schreiter, that has not been "an alternative to proclamation" nor a smoke-screen to proselytise where proclamation has been impossible;¹²⁹ *inculturation* - which grew in prominence throughout the 1970s and 80s as churches in non-Western contexts (particularly in former European colonies which themselves were pursuing the task of nation building) saw the urgency to self-theologise; and *liberation*, which became an increasingly important (and controversial) paradigm of

^{126.} David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1991), 394.

^{127.} Robert J. Schreiter, "Reconciliation as a New Paradigm of Mission" Plenary Paper no. 14, *World Council of Churches Conference on World Mission and Evangelism*, Athens (Greece), 9-16 May (2005), 1.

^{128.} Schreiter, "Reconciliation and Peacemaking" (2004), 25.

^{129.} *Ibid*, 25.

mission in Latin America during the 1960s, and which influenced other parts of the world where mission was carried out among the poor and oppressed. While these forms of mission remain important in the 21st century and continue to shape mission thinking and practice, Schreiter sees "the emergence of reconciliation as a new paradigm of mission... prompted by the changes the world experienced through the 1990s." The reconciliation paradigm "builds upon a profound message of Christian faith, and draws upon three other paradigms [dialogue, inculturation and liberation] which developed in time immediately before it did."¹³⁰

Schreiter has found support for a more central place for reconciliation in the theology of mission from fellow Roman Catholic missiologist, Stephen Bevans. Bevans has set about unraveling the complexity of mission by suggesting it contains "six operative elements":¹³¹

1. witness and proclamation; 2. liturgy, prayer, and contemplation; 3. justice, peace, and the integrity of creation; 4. dialogue with women and men of other faiths and ideologies; 5. inculturation; and 6. reconciliation. Bevans argues that while there is only one mission, these six elements testify to its complexity. And while most of these elements have, in the past, been included in similar lists attempting to define mission, the additions of the care of creation and reconciliation in Bevans' list reflect increasingly important global concerns.

Bevans notes the influence of Schreiter in bringing reconciliation to the attention of mission theologians.

Robert Schreiter's insistence on reconciliation as a new model of mission needed to be fully acknowledged... In a world of increasing violence, tensions between religions, terrorist threats, globalisation, and displacement of peoples, the church's witness to and proclamation of the possibility of reconciliation may constitute a

¹³⁰. Ibid, 28.

¹³¹. Stephen B. Bevans, "Unravelling a 'Complex Reality': Six Elements of Mission," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, Vol. 27, no 2 (April 2003).

new way of conceiving the content of the church's missionary task.¹³²

But should we be so surprised by the emergence of a paradigm of mission which centres itself on the New Testament message of reconciliation? Evangelical theologians have historically emphasised the centrality of the cross in Christian faith and life.¹³³ However, evangelicals have not always thought deeply enough about how the cross should shape a more holistic and comprehensive theology of mission. Christopher J. H. Wright has recently argued for "a mission-centred theology of the cross" and "a cross-centred theology of mission".¹³⁴ He writes:

It is a mistake, in my view, to think that while our evangelism must be centred on the cross (as of course it has to be), our social engagement and other forms of practical mission work have some other theological foundation or justification... Only in the cross are even the most intractable of enemies reconciled. Only in the cross will we finally witness the healing of all creation.¹³⁵

Such a cross-centred perspective is essential for understanding reconciliation as a paradigm of mission.

Reconciliation as an Integrative Theme for Mission

That reconciliation is being increasingly recognised as a legitimate paradigm of mission can be seen from various events that have been held in recent years. The following is by no means exhaustive but it does illustrate the prominence of reconciliation as an important theme in theological and missiological circles. In 1997, Miroslav Volf, having had some experience of the conflict in the Balkans in the early nineties, presented the Henry Martyn Lecture at the Evangelical Missionary Alliance Annual Conference, entitled "The Social

¹³². Stephen B. Bevans, "Unraveling a 'Complex Reality': Six Elements of Mission," 53.

¹³³. See I. Howard Marshall, *Aspects of the Atonement: Cross and Resurrection in the Reconciling of God and Humanity* (London: Paternoster, 2007), 2.

¹³⁴. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 312, 314.

¹³⁵. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 314.

Meaning of Reconciliation". Some years later in September 2004, the Lausanne movement sponsored a Forum on World Evangelisation which included an Issue Group which produced the 58 page document, "Reconciliation as the Mission of God: Faithful Christian Witness in a World of Destructive Conflicts and Divisions." Two months later, in November 2004, at a commemoration service for the 500th anniversary of Lady Margaret's Preachership in the University of Cambridge, Professor Graham Stanton gave the Benefactor's sermon on the topic "Terrorism and Reconciliation." The following year in Athens, the World Council of Churches' Conference on World Mission and Evangelism took as its theme "Come Holy Spirit - Heal and Reconcile: Called in Christ to be reconciling and healing communities". Then in 2006, the 19th World Methodist Conference met in Seoul, taking the theme "God in Christ Reconciling." In Hungary, 2008, the 12th Assembly of the International Association for Mission Studies devoted its attention to "Human Identity and the Gospel of Reconciliation." And most recently, in June 2009, at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, the Edinburgh 2010 Study Process for ASEAN and Sri Lanka focused on "Mission as Reconciliation in Pluralistic Contexts."

What these various meetings, conferences and consultations have in common is the desire to articulate the relevance of the full-orbed theology of reconciliation that is found in Paul, for today's worldwide contexts of Christian witness. There is hardly a more integrative theme in Scripture than Paul's vision of the reconciliation of all things. Yet, much evangelical missiology has traditionally laid emphasis on the vertical aspect of reconciliation - the personal restoration of the human-divine relationship. The Indonesian theologian, Paulus Widjaja, believes that Christian mission has too often been reduced to the individual, concerned with "the matter of forgiveness of sin and a highway to heaven,

but not so much with the embrace of others, especially the different others."¹³⁶ This Widjaja calls "verticalism". On the other hand, there have been missional gatherings that have erred towards the other extreme. For instance, the Athens 2005 document from the WCC was criticised for not including sufficient emphasis on evangelism under a conference theme that talked about the reconciling work of the Holy Spirit in a divided world. The Churches' Commission on Mission (Churches Together in Britain and Ireland) wrote to the World Council of Churches' Mission Commission with "an urgent question..."

How will the World Council of Churches, through its Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, enable us to 'talk the walk' that we are sharing together?... Evangelising mission has not featured prominently on the agenda of our conference in Athens. Few of the synaxeis directly tackled the task of proclaiming God's reconciling work in Christ by word and deed. The mentions of evangelism in plenaries seemed primarily cautionary – in the sense that while they (rightly) drew attention to abuses of the Word and the problem of proselytism, no positive picture was offered of the possibilities of healing and reconciling evangelistic practice. Evangelism is a key component of holistic Christian mission precisely because it is the means by which we name the One who makes healing and reconciliation possible in his life, death and resurrection.¹³⁷

In his evaluation of the conference, Tormod Engelsen expressed disappointment that "no significant attention was devoted to 'vertical reconciliation'."¹³⁸ So while some parts of the church fall into verticalism others may be guilty of horizontalism! On the whole, the past decade has witnessed a more missional reading of the doctrine of reconciliation seeking to articulate an integrative rather than dichotomous understanding of mission. We will now attempt to locate some key aspects of reconciliation within the broader territory of missiology.

¹³⁶. Paulus Widjaja, "Mission as Reconciliation Amidst Religious Extremism: An Indonesian Christian Perspective", *Edinburgh 2010: Mission as Reconciliation in Pluralistic Contexts* The Edinburgh 2010 Study Process for ASEAN and Sri Lanka, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, (8-11 June 2009), 1.

¹³⁷. This is an extract of a letter dated 15 May, 2005, written by British and Irish participants at the Conference on World Mission and Evangelism and addressed to The Moderator, Commission on World Mission and Evangelism, World Council of Churches, Geneva.

¹³⁸. Tormod Engelsen, " 'Come Holy Spirit, Heal and Reconcile': An Evangelical Evaluation of the CWME Mission Conference in Athens, May 9-16, 2005" *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 29, no. 4 (2005): 190-192.

The Social Implications of Reconciliation

According to Miroslav Volf, the effectiveness of church communities in becoming peacemakers and reconcilers in situations of ethnic tension or conflict depends on the extent to which congregations have not only understood the biblical message of reconciliation but have grasped "more adequately *the inherent social meaning of reconciliation*."¹³⁹ Along these lines we note the contribution of Dietrich Bonhoeffer who, in his doctoral dissertation, drew attention to "the social intention of all the basic Christian concepts."¹⁴⁰

The influence of Western forms of Christianity has tended to emphasise the benefits of the gospel to the individual. In tracing "Models of Christian Witness in the Twentieth Century", Wilbert Shenk writes of "The Individual Conversion Model":

Fundamentalism, which was essentially a movement of reaction against the main features of liberalism, as a true child of the Enlightenment, emphasised the individual. In the fundamentalist vision, conversion was a highly individual matter. This effectively undercut the possibility of collective Christian responsibility in the social realm.¹⁴¹

However, the social implications of the doctrine of reconciliation have not always gone unnoticed. Around the same time that the 'fundamentals' were being published as tracts,

¹³⁹. Miroslav Volf, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* Issue 35 (2001): 12.

¹⁴⁰. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, in *Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works*, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 21.

¹⁴¹. Wilbert Shenk, *Changing Frontiers of Mission* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1999), 23. Shenk provides some background to the term 'fundamentalism' along with evidence suggesting that the fundamentalist position which tended to dichotomise 'word and deed' was not accepted by all evangelicals. In a footnote on page 23 Shenk writes: "Fundamentalism takes its name from a series of tracts on theological 'fundamentals' published between 1910 and 1915. Various conservative evangelicals who sympathised with this initiative did not accept the sharp dichotomy between 'word and deed' that became the hallmark of fundamentalism. Many of these groups had their roots in Pietism or the holiness movement of the nineteenth century. The position they took did not lend itself to fervid polemics based on sharply drawn lines of battle. Norris Magnuson's *Salvation in the Slums: Evangelical Social Work* (1990) is a case study of this variety of evangelical, which predated the rise of fundamentalism and, therefore, never accepted fully the normative fundamentalist position."

James Denney was writing about the doctrine of reconciliation. Against the backdrop of the horrors of the First World War, and after three-hundred pages in which he sets out the doctrine, Denney turns to describe the power of the doctrine of reconciliation in terms of its social dimension:

The life of reconciliation is a life which itself exercises a reconciling power. It is the ultimate witness to that in God which overcomes all that separates man from Himself and men from each other. Hence it is indispensable to all who work for peace and good will among men. Not only the alienation of men from God, but their alienation from one another - the estrangement of classes within the same society, the estrangement of nations and races within the great family of humanity - yield in the last resort to love alone. Impartial justice, arbitrating from without, can do little for them. But a spirit delivered from pride and made truly humble by repentance, a spirit purged from selfishness and able in the power of Christ's love to see its neighbour's interest as its own, will prove victorious alike in the clash of rivalries of capital and labour, and in the international rivalries that are now devastating the world. It is in its all-reconciling power that Paul sees most clearly the absoluteness and finality of the Christian religion. The centrality and absoluteness of the reconciliation... make it in the New Testament the basis of far-reaching inferences of every kind.¹⁴²

Considering what has so far been said about the doctrine of reconciliation in this chapter, there may indeed be a case for suggesting that no other aspect of the atonement, no other picture or concept relating to salvation in the New Testament, can be worked out in quite these sorts of social dimensions. We would not, however, want to press this too far. It is surely wrong to express any Christian doctrine in such a way that we neglect its relational and ethical dimensions.¹⁴³ But some scholars believe there is a profound personal and interpersonal character to the doctrine of reconciliation which makes it powerfully relevant in an increasingly fragmented world.¹⁴⁴

¹⁴² Denney, *The Christian Doctrine of Reconciliation*, 329-330.

¹⁴³ The following comments from Stephen Williams alert us to this danger: "Luther establishes the principal of justification by faith, not as a cold doctrine, but as a life-transforming power as we are led into living union with Christ. But the seed of faith bears the fruit of love towards our neighbour. As Luther strikingly puts it: I must indwell my neighbour by love as I indwell Christ by faith. One needs to ponder this formulation. It is nothing less than a doctrine of total immersion - total immersion in my neighbour now that I live by faith in God, through Jesus Christ." The quotation from Luther is from "Three Treatises", (Muhlenberg, 1960) and the full editorial by Williams can be found in *Themelios* 22:1, (1996), 2.

¹⁴⁴ See de Gruchy, *Reconciliation*, (2002), 46; John Stott, *The Cross of Christ* (Leicester: IVP,

As with the relative absence of much substantial treatment on reconciliation in major biblical reference works, so also we find a dearth of study on the social implications of reconciliation. Volf has perhaps been the most vocal critic of this scholarly silence. He writes: "There is a disturbing lack of sustained attempts to explain the social meaning of reconciliation of human beings to God and to relate the core beliefs about reconciliation to the shape of Christian social responsibility."¹⁴⁵ Volf quotes the Catholic theologian, Gregory Baum, who has noted the lack of any treatment on the social meaning of reconciliation in standard Catholic reference works. But "Protestant reference works tell the same story", ¹⁴⁶ says Volf, who since 1997, has published various papers and a major work exploring the theme of reconciliation.¹⁴⁷ Volf believes that the biblical concept of reconciliation offers a way of approaching Christian social responsibility that would help churches be agents of peace. He is concerned that "the social agenda of the church has been isolated from the message of reconciliation".¹⁴⁸ This has occurred in two main ways. Firstly, the doctrine of reconciliation has been reduced to "the *reconciliation of an individual with God*" so that the doctrine then has a theological and personal meaning, but no wider social meaning."¹⁴⁹ Secondly, Christian social activists have often simply "conceded the truncated understanding of reconciliation" and placed the pursuit of social

1986), 192.

^{145.} Volf, "Social Meaning" (2001): 12-13.

^{146.} Volf, "Social Meaning" (2001): 13. Volf provides a brief survey of those works, and those culprits, responsible for omitting substantial treatment of the social dimensions of reconciliation.

^{147.} For instance, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" Henry Martyn Lecture 1997, Evangelical Missionary Alliance Annual Conference, London (12 November, 1997); "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation," *Mishkan: A forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* Issue 35 (2001); *Exclusion and Embrace: A Theological Exploration of Identity, Otherness and Reconciliation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996).

^{148.} Volf, "Social Meaning" (2001): 14.

^{149.} *Ibid*, 14.

justice and liberation at the centre of the Christian vision. "Such groups", Volf claims, "have effectively left the message of reconciliation to the otherworldly 'pietists' and taken up the pursuit of liberation as the most appropriate response to social problems."¹⁵⁰ Volf's way forward is to focus on Paul's theology of reconciliation and to draw upon the work of the New Testament scholar, Seyoon Kim, particularly his exegesis of 2 Corinthians 5:17-21.¹⁵¹ Kim's work concerns how Paul came to understand and use the term 'reconciliation', arguing that it originated with Paul's encounter with Christ on the road to Damascus. Volf quotes from Kim in his 1997 Henry Martyn lecture:

It is most likely that his [Paul's] use of the metaphor of reconciliation grew out of his own theological reflections on his Damascus road conversion experience. This thesis explains more plausibly than any other, the fundamental innovation that Paul made in the idea of reconciliation, that is, that it is not human beings who reconcile an angry God to themselves... rather, it is God who reconciles human beings to himself through the atoning death of Jesus Christ. For on the Damascus Road, Paul, who came to see himself as God's enemy in his activities before Damascus, experienced God's reconciling action, which brought forgiveness of sins and the making of a new creation by his grace.¹⁵²

For Volf, this theology of reconciliation contains two features which help spell out its social meaning. First: "though grace is unthinkable without justice, justice is subordinate to grace."¹⁵³ Second: "Though reconciliation of human beings to God has priority, reconciliation between human beings is intrinsic to their reconciliation to God."¹⁵⁴ Volf develops Kim's thesis and concludes that from the beginning, the enmity Paul

^{150.} Ibid, 15.

^{151.} The relevant work by Volf is "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation", Henry Martyn Lecture 1997, London, 12th November, 1997, (Evangelical Missionary Alliance, 1997). The work by Seyoon Kim, "God Reconciled His Enemy to Himself: The Origin of Paul's Concept of Reconciliation" in *The Road From Damascus: The Impact of Paul's Conversion on His Life, Thought and Ministry*, ed. R. N. Longenecker (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1997).

^{152.} Volf, "Social Meaning" (1997), 4, citing Kim, "God Reconciled," (1997), 122. In his later article of the same title, "The Social Meaning of Reconciliation" published in 2001, Volf admits that "Kim's claim about the origin of Paul's notion of reconciliation in the Damascus road experience may be too strong." *Mishkan: A Forum on the Gospel and the Jewish People* Issue 35 (2001):17.

^{153.} Volf, "Social Meaning," (1997), 4.

^{154.} Ibid, 5.

demonstrated toward God was enmity toward human beings, and the enmity he demonstrated toward human beings was enmity toward God: "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" (Acts 9:4). As a consequence, argues Volf, reconciliation has both vertical and horizontal dimensions:

Reconciliation contains a turn away from enmity toward people, not just from enmity to God, and it contains a movement toward a human community, precisely that community which was the target of enmity. Just as the persecutor was received by Christ, so the persecutor was received by the community which he had persecuted.¹⁵⁵

Volf points out that as far as Paul was concerned, the model of God's reconciling movement toward humanity is the model for how Christians should relate to their neighbours and to the 'other' in a divided society (Romans 15:7). For Paul, reconciliation became the heart of the gospel he proclaimed and lived. He conceived "a grand vision of reconciliation", such as in Colossians 1:15-20, where "the whole of reality is a vision of the reconciliation of all things." And Volf concludes:

If social engagement is to be properly Christian, it must be governed by this vision. And only if social engagement is governed by this vision will churches have adequate theological resources to resist the temptation to become accomplices in conflicts and instead function as agents of peace.¹⁵⁶

As part of his recent work on the atonement, Howard Marshall has included an exploration of the social implications of reconciliation. Briefly, we note three factors Marshall believes are thrown into relief by the motif of reconciliation.¹⁵⁷ Firstly, the fundamental breakdown between God and sinners; secondly, the way in which God takes the initiative to restore the relationship broken by sin (other pictures do incorporate the fact of God's initiative but the unmistakably relational picture of reconciliation gives this greater clarity); thirdly, the

¹⁵⁵. Volf, "Social Meaning," (2001), 19.

¹⁵⁶. Ibid, (2001), 5.

¹⁵⁷. Marshall, *Aspects*, 129-131.

restored relationship with God that is the result of reconciliation (here we find the negative - sin has been cancelled - the enmity is over; and the positive - peace is the result). But a fourth factor is taken up, one which Marshall thinks deserves specific underlining: "the way that reconciliation makes the social dimension of salvation more explicit than do some of the other pictures (specifically redemption, salvation, justification)."¹⁵⁸

Describing how the vertical, personal relationship to God tends to dominate Christian life and worship, Marshall nevertheless detects "a welcome sign of change that the sideways, or horizontal, relationship has begun to be expressed..."¹⁵⁹ Admittedly, "religion is a matter of my personal individual response to Christ, a response that only I can make, but this response involves also a two-way relationship to my Christian brothers and sisters."¹⁶⁰ This human dimension to reconciliation is expressed in the New Testament in a number ways, and Marshall surveys mainly the Pauline letters to illustrate his point. Much of what Marshall says on other New Testament passages converges in his summary of 2 Corinthians 5-6. Here again the context has to do with the personal relationship with God - but that relationship is the foundation for the Corinthians to welcome Paul. They were not as open towards Paul as they should have been (2 Corinthians 6:12-13): those who claim to be at peace with God, must also be at peace with the missionaries God sends into their midst.¹⁶¹ Here then is "a very practical and important corollary of reconciliation."¹⁶² But the implications of a restored relationship with God move in more evangelistic directions

^{158.} Ibid, 131.

^{159.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 131.

^{160.} Ibid, 131.

^{161.} Ibid, 134.

^{162.} Ibid, 134.

as far as the language of 2 Corinthians 5 and 6 are concerned. How should those reconciled to God engage in evangelism? Where the doctrine of reconciliation is set in relation to evangelism

its use carries the implication that those who make known the gospel and who live as Christians in the world share the reconciling love of the God whose servants they are. They cannot very well preach a gospel of reconciliation to a people with whom they themselves are not prepared to live in peace and love. One cannot shout the gospel across a chasm to people on the other side so that they may have a relationship with God above but not one with those on this side of the chasm.¹⁶³

Reconciliation with God - the restoring of the personal relationship with God and the reconciliation that takes shape within the church community "is the foundation for a Christian attitude of love and reconciliation to all people."¹⁶⁴ The indwelling Spirit brings, among other things, peace, which is not just an inner feeling, or an interior state of mind, but a peace that forms the basis of "ethical attitudes to other people", and allows Christians to take up their calling to be peacemakers.¹⁶⁵

Having set out a strong argument for the centrality and relevance of reconciliation, Marshall does not ignore the fact that "one problem remains":

This New Testament call for reconciliation with all people does not seem to provide a basis for reconciliation between peoples who do not share the theological, christological and indeed pneumatological foundation of its appeal.¹⁶⁶

Theologically, reconciliation in the New Testament is connected to the purposes of God to restore all things through recreation. The reason we need reconciling is because of our sin, and this is only remedied through Christ's death. When sinners are reconciled to God there

^{163.} Ibid, 134.

^{164.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 134.

^{165.} Ibid, 134. Marshall notes the significance of passages such as Romans 14:17-19; 1 Corinthians 7:15; Ephesians 4:3; Colossians 3:15; 2 Timothy 2:22; Hebrews 12:14; James 3:17-18; 1 Peter 3:11).

^{166.} Ibid, 135.

is the accompanying "inescapable obligation"¹⁶⁷ that they will offer that same reconciliation to others and adopt the Spirit-directed lifestyle of peacemakers. The New Testament clearly calls on Christians to "set their own house in order" and to live their lives under the lordship of Christ. But the key question is "how does this affect reconciliation with and between people of other religious faiths and none?"¹⁶⁸ Marshall's answer can be outlined as follows:

1. The benefits of adopting a Christian ethic are recognised by many. There are various religious people as well as humanists who lay great emphasis on peace and reconciliation. In many parts of the world there is the desire and hope for peace and reconciliation among peoples who are not Christian or influenced by Christian values.
2. The recognition that many non-Christians see the importance for reconciliation should be accompanied by the recognition that many Christians have not been the peacemakers they are called to be by their own Scriptures. Hostile actions and attitudes of the past should be repented of.
3. The acknowledgement that professing Christians have not always lived the way of reconciliation should not diminish our commending of the Christian gospel and what it has to offer the world in terms of peace and reconciliation. Christians will want to give due recognition to those efforts towards reconciliation that spring from other sources. Marshall believes that Christians "have a duty to proclaim [their] gospel and [their] ethic as the right and best way for humanity."¹⁶⁹

^{167.} Ibid, 135.

^{168.} Ibid, 135.

^{169.} Marshall, *Aspects*, 136.

4. There must be a prophetic voice maintained by the Christian community to speak out against violence and to work to end the spirals of retaliation and revenge that mar so many communities in today's world.

5. Ultimately, Christians will hold that substantial healing and peace can only be known when people are restored in their relationship with God.

The perspectives that Volf and Marshall provide for a theological and biblical basis for the social meaning of reconciliation lead us to consider two further implications for a missional understanding of the doctrine. These are inseparable from the community of believers. In matters of discipleship and mission, the New Testament is strongly relational. As Barth puts it, "A private monadic faith is not the Christian faith."¹⁷⁰ The necessary relational outworking of the doctrine of reconciliation presupposes communities of local Christians who together live as peacemakers in their local context. As we consider reconciliation as a paradigm of mission, two important questions form the basis of this closing section of the chapter. Firstly, how does reconciliation relate to cultural diversity? Secondly, what is the connection between the ultimate hope of reconciliation and the present role of the church?

Reconciliation and Cultural Diversity

In *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer writes that "the actions of the Christians spring from the unity which is created in Christ, the unity of God and world, the unity of life. In Christ life finds its unity again."¹⁷¹ In speaking about the gospel of reconciliation, we are indeed speaking about a unity in Christ. But it is a unity in diversity. The reconciliation we find in the Bible

¹⁷⁰. Barth, *Church Dogmatics* IV part 1, (1956), 677.

¹⁷¹. Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955), 191.

is not homogenisation. Part of the uniqueness of the Christian gospel of reconciliation is that it unites people of all cultures, ethnic groups and languages, while at the same time allowing people to maintain the distinctiveness of their own culture. Biblical reconciliation affirms cultural pluralism.

The Translatability of the Gospel

The African scholar Lamin Sanneh has effectively shown in his research that Christian mission in Africa and Asia has contributed to the preserving of cultures and languages which would otherwise have drifted into extinction.¹⁷² The main factor enabling such preservation was the encouragement given to local people to use the vernacular to express their Christian faith. Dictionaries and grammars were compiled and published, with the effect of breathing life into cultures and languages few people had ever heard of. Whereas to be a Muslim entails accepting Arabic as the language of faith, praying towards Mecca and endeavouring to do pilgrimage to Mecca, Christianity views all cultures as suitable for Christianity to take root in and be expressed through. Within the Body of Christ, cultural diversity is celebrated, making the church arguably the most diverse and inclusive society in the world. As Charles R. Taber has observed, "Christianity is the only religion in history to have *both* a universal mission *and* an intentionally multicultural membership and expression."¹⁷³

When the church is described as 'catholic' it conveys the idea of a universal church comprising a rich diversity of people "from every nation, from all tribes and peoples and

¹⁷² See Lamin Sanneh, "Pluralism and Christian Commitment," in *Theology of Today*, Vol. 45 (April 1988), 21-33.

¹⁷³ Charles R. Taber, *The World Is Too Much With Us: "Culture" in Modern Protestant Missions*, Macon: Mercer University Press, 1991), 15. And see Lamin Sanneh, *Translating the Message*, (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1989).

tongues" (Rev. 7:9). For Vanhoozer, "The catholicity of the church is ultimately rooted in the catholicity of the gospel itself. The gospel is a message for all kinds and races of people..."¹⁷⁴

Cultural Identity

Scholarly work in mission studies over recent years has highlighted the importance for missionaries to recognise cultural context, the problems of cultural imperialism and the debilitating effects of power relationships. Harold Dean Trulear has called for "a more sophisticated conversation about reconciliation across ethnic and cultural lines."¹⁷⁵ And this raises the issue of cultural identity, which can so easily become sacralized. Cultural and religious loyalties then become blurred so that a person's identity is taken primarily from their cultural and ethnic group. Minority groups who have suffered oppression generally have a stronger sense of identity to their own cultural group than to the wider Christian community outside of that group. Majority peoples in a position of power are often blind to the extent to which they have combined their religious and cultural loyalties and as a result weakened the impact of the gospel on their culture and contributed to the marginalising of minority groups. Vinoth Ramachandra, writing about the conflict in Sri Lanka, describes how entrenched identities, not to mention a strict hierarchical division between clergy and laity, has hindered genuine dialogue even within churches:

...we have the strange phenomenon of Tamils and Sinhalese working together in the same church but never talking face-to-face about their respective fears and perceptions of what is happening around them! In a heavily clergy/pastor dominated church context, it has proved enormously difficult for so-called laymen and laywomen to initiate such open sharing in the congregation. Many pastors/clergy continue to think primarily as Sinhalese or as Tamils, and not as

¹⁷⁴. Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the Church," in *Evangelical Futures*, ed Craig Bartholomew et al (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 82.

¹⁷⁵. Harold Dean Trulear, "Reconciliation," in *Evangelical Dictionary of World Missions*, ed. A. Scott Moreau (Grand Rapids: Baker; Carlisle: Paternoster: 2000), 811.

True Globality

While some Christians come to the issue of cultural and ethnic identity with the view that Christian faith is 'colour-blind' and all Christians are one in Christ, others prefer to emphasise cultural diversity and the multicultural nature of the Body of Christ. The first can lead to an emphasis in which cultural context is hardly considered; the second can emphasise cultural context to such an extent that it perpetuates ethnic division.¹⁷⁷ The Bible recognises the rich diversity of cultures in God's creation and Christians can celebrate this within the church. However, Christians are also part of a worldwide body of Christ and local, ethnic identities come under allegiance to Christ and the bond with other believers around the world. As Ramachandra puts it, Christians need to embody "a true globality". Describing "globalism" as a "false universalism", he proposes both gospel and Church as "true universalism."¹⁷⁸ In contrast to globalism the Church embodies "a true globality":

The gospel that creates the Church has a universal scope and intent, simply because its content is universal: it announces the dawn of God's future for humanity and the non-human creation. But this message is articulated and enacted through particular, local events. 'The Word became flesh and dwelt among us' (John 1:14). Through the incarnation (a unique, local embodiment of the global presence of God) and the atoning death of Christ, we are united both to God as the centre and also to one another. The dividing walls of gender, ethnicity, age, economic class and social status are all broken down (Gal. 3:28; Eph. 2:14-22)... Christian conversion involves a new *belonging* - this new global family takes precedence over our biological, ethnic and national loyalties.¹⁷⁹

¹⁷⁶. Vinoth Ramachandra, "Ethnic Conflicts" (paper presented at the Edinburgh 2010 Study Process for ASEAN and Sri Lanka, "Mission as Reconciliation in Pluralistic Contexts", Seremban, Malaysia, 8-11 June, 2009).

¹⁷⁷. Some hold that the Church Growth strategy known as the Homogenous Unit Principle leans dangerously towards this second emphasis. See Rene Padilla, *Mission Between the Times*, (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1985).

¹⁷⁸. Ramachandra, "Global Society: Challenges for Christian Mission." *Anvil* 21, no. 1, (2004): 9-21.

¹⁷⁹. *Ibid*, 20.

This is an important perspective even at the level of the local church. Writing with evangelicals in mind, Vanhoozer believes they "need to recover the idea that the local church is a representative of the whole church." And rather than focusing exclusively on their own particular, present context, "evangelicals need to be reintroduced to their long-lost brothers and sisters of former times and distant places."¹⁸⁰ In this sense the social implications of reconciliation are understood to reach across space and time.

Ultimate Reconciliation and the Present Role of the Church

As the letter to the Ephesians explains, the church is a multiethnic community, and in this new humanity "is the promise that this society mirrors as in a microcosm the hope of the world and the universe, at present divided and at odds with its creator."¹⁸¹ F. F. Bruce says that in the New Testament "God's reconciling work in his people during the present age is presented as a pilot scheme for the realisation of his saving purpose."¹⁸² The scope of God's reconciling work is immense. Paul presents us with a breathtaking vision of cosmic reconciliation in Colossians 1:15-20, echoing themes of Romans 8:19-21, and similar to those comprehensive visions in the Old Testament, found especially in Isaiah (19:19-25; 65, 66; and see also Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:6). Such a future vision is to be anticipated by the church in the present, shaping it into a community of hope. John de Gruchy's stirring words bring together the themes of reconciliation, mission and hope:

The gospel of reconciliation thus leads directly to defining the mission of the Church in the world, namely to proclaim the gospel of reconciliation (2 Cor. 5:11-20) and the eschatological hope of God's restoration and renewal of the whole creation. The Church is God's reconciled and reconciling community, God's new humanity, a sign and a witness of God's purpose for the whole inhabited universe or *oikumene*... Complete reconciliation is a future hope that shapes the way in

¹⁸⁰. Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the Church", 82.

¹⁸¹. Martin, *Reconciliation*, 232

¹⁸². F. F. Bruce, "Some Thoughts on Paul and Paulinism," *Vox Evangelica* 7 (1971): 14.

which we live our lives.¹⁸³

The great eschatological vision of the Old Testament, and carried forward into Revelation 21 and 22, sees not only the peoples of the earth coming to Yahweh, but all their achievements, wealth and glory, being brought purified into the New Jerusalem, the new heavens and new earth (Isaiah 19, 60:5; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:6, Rev. 21:24-26). How this will happen exactly, is not spelled out, but these various texts suggest that somehow our human activity and the whole of creation will share in the liberating rule of God. In Isaiah, the nations and their ultimate reconciliation with God and with one another is pictured in terms of a river of peace and the nations streaming, with their wealth, into "the world city of peace".¹⁸⁴ For Paul, this great future vision of reconciliation brings hope for the present.

Christian hope is an important dimension in the motivation to live transformed lives and for churches to be agents of reconciliation as they anticipate the fulfilment of God's promise that all things will be reconciled to God through the blood of Christ's cross. A vision of this magnitude can have a transforming effect on the relationship with the 'other', so that, for instance in divided societies, the diversity of a church community united in Christ can be a powerful testimony to how the gospel transcends ethnic and racial barriers.

In Colossians the vision of cosmic reconciliation is bound up with the role of the church (18a). That Paul has already mentioned the gospel's worldwide growth and fruitfulness

¹⁸³. de Gruchy, 55-56.

¹⁸⁴. Motyer suggests that "*Wealth* is 'glory', and as 'the glory of the Lord' means 'the Lord in all his glory', so in the Zion that is yet to be (Rev. 21:24-26) every nation will be present 'in all its glory', i.e. the glory of what it was meant to be and will be when its individuality is brought to mature perfection in the city of God." *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries: Isaiah* (Leicester: IVP, 1999), 403.

(1:6), and proceeds to talk about the "mystery that has been kept hidden for ages" (1:26) but which is now revealed in and through the church, implies that "it is by its gospel living (1:10) and by its gospel preaching (1:27) that the cosmic goal of reconciled perfection will be achieved."¹⁸⁵ On the significance of the cosmic vision, Dunn writes:

The vision is vast. The claim is mind-blowing. It says much for the faith of these first Christians that they should see in Christ's death and resurrection quite literally the key to resolving the disharmonies of nature and the inhumanities of humankind, that the character of God's creation and God's concern for the universe in its fullest expression could be so caught and encapsulated for them in the cross of Christ... In some ways still more striking is the implied vision of the church as the focus and means towards this cosmic reconciliation - the community in which that reconciliation has already taken place (or begun to take place) and whose responsibility it is to live out (cf. particularly 3:8-15) as well as to proclaim its secret (cf. 4:2-6).¹⁸⁶

In other words, a foretaste of God's ultimate reconciling work is already present in creation - in the church. The working out of this eschatological vision into the concrete ministry of the church, for instance in its reconciling mission, will, to use Vanhoozer's words, require the recovery of "the eschatological imagination." By this, he means

the ability to see what is not (yet) there, the ability to see creation as it is being transformed and brought into conformity with Christ. The eschatological imagination helps us to see the visible church in terms of the already-not yet tension. Thanks to the imagination, we are able to envisage what the visible church is becoming.¹⁸⁷

And while God's ultimate reconciling work is present now in the church - "God's masterpiece of reconciliation in the present age..." - Bruce reminds us that the church "is also his means for the bringing into being of that cosmic fellowship of reconciliation..."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁵. J. D. G. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon: A Commentary on the Greek Text* NIGTC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 104.

¹⁸⁶. Dunn, *The Epistles to the Colossians and to Philemon*, 104.

¹⁸⁷. Vanhoozer, "Evangelicalism and the Church," 80.

¹⁸⁸. F. F. Bruce, "Some Thoughts," 14.

However, even if we justify a broad survey of the NT materials prior to attending to the Malaysian context, setting out the broad terms of reconciliation on NT terms requires us to go beyond these two questions surrounding cultural diversity and ultimate reconciliation. For the underlying assumption in the NT is that the ministry of reconciliation is going to involve suffering for those who undertake it.

Reconciliation and Suffering

Barth describes the reconciling work of Christ as "an obedience of suffering... the way of the Son of God into the far country".¹⁸⁹ Authentic reconciliation is costly. It is, as Derek Tidball describes it, a "fatal reconciliation" for it is accomplished through the death of Christ.¹⁹⁰ As Church history demonstrates, there is often a correlation between the authenticity of the Church's ministry as an agent of reconciliation and the suffering which the Church endures.¹⁹¹

In his second letter to the Corinthians Paul writes much about his ministry being carried out within the context of suffering and weakness. And at this point we may find it useful to turn to Bonhoeffer's insights into reconciliation and the principle of 'vicarious action'. This principle has been described as "the structural principle of the Christian church-community..."¹⁹² In his doctoral dissertation, Bonhoeffer wrote of "*the principle of vicarious representative action* [becoming] fundamental for the church-community of God

^{189.} Barth, *Church Dogmatics* Vol. IV, part 1 (1956), 177, 244.

^{190.} Tidball, *The Message of the Cross*, 231.

^{191.} See Peter Kuzmic, "Integral Mission in a World of Violence" in *Justice, Mercy and Humility: Integral Mission and the Poor*, ed. Tim Chester (Carlisle: Paternoster, 2000).

^{192.} Joachim von Soosten, "Editor's Afterword to the German Edition," in Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio: A Theological Study of the Sociology of the Church*, Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works, Vol. 1 (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1998), 290.

in and through Christ... 'vicarious action' as the life-principle of the new humanity that Christ has brought into being."¹⁹³ Joachim von Soosten explains that "the proclamation of the gospel and the celebration of the sacraments make Christ's vicarious representative action... present for us; and this vicarious representative action in turn finds expression in the church's social form."¹⁹⁴ What shape will the ultimate reconciled community of God take? The answer is the form of Christ. In the present, the extent to which we are formed in Christ, as the new humanity of God, is the extent to which we will be an authentic agent of reconciliation in this broken world. 'Vicarious action', suffering for the sake of the gospel of reconciliation, together with an uncompromising loyalty in witness to Christ - these are the means by which Christ's all-encompassing reconciling Lordship is made known to the world. In Bonhoeffer's words, "The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us."¹⁹⁵ It is when the church seeks to be truly church that it influences the world most. But it is not that the church has an agenda for the world. Rather, it is as the church takes the form of Christ, that God's purposes for the world take shape, and God's cosmic reconciliation is worked out. Reflecting on the kind of 'formation' the Scriptures have in mind, Bonhoeffer writes:

Their primary concern is not with the forming of a world by means of plans and programmes. Whenever they speak of forming they are concerned only with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ... formation comes only by being drawn in into the form of Jesus Christ. It comes only as formation in His likeness, as *conformation* with the unique form of Him who was made man, as crucified, and rose again.¹⁹⁶

Applying Bonhoeffer's insights to a world in conflict, Vinoth Ramachandra says:

If we want to discern God's purposes for the nations, it is not at the 'blood-stained face of history' that we look, but at the blood-stained cross. The latter reveals a God whose will is nothing less than the formation of Christ in us: the healing of a

^{193.} Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, (1998), 146-147.

^{194.} von Soosten, "Editor's Afterword," (1998), 294.

^{195.} Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Ethics* (London: SCM, 1955), 41.

^{196.} *Ibid*, 61.

fractured humanity and the glorification of a spoiled creation. Compared to this, every other vision of the world appears bleak, narrow, escapist or simply sick.¹⁹⁷

To joyfully fulfil its role as an agent of reconciliation in a hostile world the church must walk the way of the cross. Reconciliation in this sense, is 'fatal'. And yet, in Bonhoeffer's words:

The actions of the Christian... spring from joy in the accomplishment of the reconciliation of the world with God; they spring from the peace which comes with the completion of the work of salvation in Jesus Christ; they spring from the all-embracing life which is Jesus.¹⁹⁸

Conclusion

The aim of this chapter has been to set out a *prima facie* case for the doctrine of reconciliation. Interacting with the works of various scholars we have gathered together the main contours of reconciliation. It is a central theme in the New Testament, providing us with a picture of salvation which has unique personal and interpersonal, and therefore social dimensions. We have seen that although the doctrine of reconciliation has often been understood in a limited and narrow way, restricted to the vertical dimension, the horizontal, human dimension to reconciliation is also expressed in the New Testament.

This chapter has explored something of how the gospel of reconciliation relates to the themes of unity and cultural diversity. Part of the uniqueness of the gospel of reconciliation is that it unites people of all cultures and ethnic groups, while at the same time allowing people to maintain the distinctiveness of their own culture. Recent years have seen the emergence of missiological readings of reconciliation and the doctrine being used to form a fresh paradigm of mission. Scholars expounding the social implications of reconciliation

¹⁹⁷. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 171.

¹⁹⁸. Bonhoeffer, *Ethics*, 191.

have also underlined the importance of the local church as an agent of peace and reconciliation.

Having laid this theological foundation, our next task is to examine the context in which our research takes place, namely Malaysia. With a history of racial violence and in recent years, widespread, albeit low-level ethnic tensions, the themes of peaceful coexistence and social harmony are recurring ones in the discourse of Malaysian society.¹⁹⁹ On the basis of what has been discussed in this chapter certain important questions for the Malaysian context come to mind. What role has the church played in working towards a united Malaysian community? How do Malaysian Christians approach the question of national identity? Given the social plurality of religions in its society, how can the church in Malaysia be committed both to the proclamation of the gospel and to being an agent for reconciliation in a divided country? The Malaysian theologian Hwa Yung writes:

If there is to be true 'national' unity, there must first be a genuine consensus in the country based on serious dialogue and mutual respect. Here again, the church needs to seriously respond. For surely as the followers of the Prince of Peace, we are also called to the task of reconciliation. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God' (Matthew 5:9).²⁰⁰

Chapter two will explore the socio-historical landscape and provide a further framework for us to examine what it might mean for Malaysian Christians to see themselves as peacemakers.

¹⁹⁹. Numerous examples could be cited. For instance, the largest daily newspaper in Malaysia, *The Star*, published an article in 2004 entitled, "Uniting as one Malaysian race", in which the current peace was described as "fragile". *Star*, Monday, 10th May, 2004, p. 22

²⁰⁰. Hwa Yung, "The Role of the Church in Vision 2020" in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, Ng Kam Weng, ed. (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 69. Further research is needed to discover whether or not there is an ethnic basis to different attitudes to theology and reconciliation in Malaysia.

Chapter 2: The Socio-historical Context of the Church in Malaysia

Ethicists and theologians have traditionally done their work with 'a strong inclination to neglect history'.²⁰¹

Biblical reconciliation does not happen in a vacuum but must be worked out in the real world of people. Any attempt to work out the social implications of biblical reconciliation will require a thorough understanding of the context in which those implications are applied. We are therefore turning to consider the context with which this thesis is concerned, namely the country of Malaysia. The territory of this chapter will cover Malaysia's early history, the arrival of Islam, colonialism and independence. As with all historical accounts, this chapter will be selective in what it covers, and choices about what to highlight from the past have been governed by present day concerns.²⁰²

²⁰¹. James Gustafson, 'The Relevance of Historical Understanding', in Paul Deats, Jr. (ed), *Towards a Discipline of Social Ethics: Essays in Honour of Walter George Muelder* (Boston: Boston University Press, 1972), 42 and cited in Charles Villa-Vicencio, *A Theology of Reconstruction: Nation-building and Human Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 51.

²⁰². There is a vast amount of literature on the history of Malaysia. One of the best standard texts is Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia* 2nd Edition (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) which also includes a substantial section of further reading. We are limiting ourselves to look at certain aspects of Malaysia's history and society, trying to provide a broad survey, yet throwing the spotlight on aspects which enable us to better understand the socio-historical context of the Malaysian churches. Insufficient space means we cannot give as much attention to issues relating to East Malaysia, but events and perspectives from Sarawak and Sabah will be drawn in as and when appropriate. Significant space has been devoted to the influence of Islam in Malaysia and the surrounding region. There are of course other faiths present in Malaysia, but none have made their presence felt and shaped the political, social and cultural landscape as much as Islam has.

Diversity in the Making

West Malaysia is located on the southernmost point of the continent of Asia, bordering Thailand to the north and reaching down to its neighbour, Singapore, in the south. East of this Peninsula and 530 kilometres across the South China Sea, lie the two states of Sarawak and Sabah which comprise East Malaysia, located along the northern part of the island of Borneo. The Federation of Malaysia, made up in total of 13 states, is a secular democracy with a federated constitutional monarchy, modelled on the Westminster parliamentary system. There are nine hereditary rulers and the *Agong* (king), who serves a five-year term, is selected by rotation by the Conference of Rulers. Article 3 (1) of Malaysia's Constitution states that "Islam is the religion of the Federation but other religions may be practised in peace and harmony in any part of the Federation." The place of Islam in a nation described as a secular democracy requires some clarification. What precisely Islam's place would be in the newly independent Malaysia was carefully considered by the commission whose job it was to draft the Constitution. Under the leadership of Rt-Hon Lord William Reid, the Reid Commission provided the following clarification:

We have considered the question of whether there should be any statement in the Constitution to the effect that Islam should be the State religion. There was universal agreement that if any such provision were inserted it must be made clear that it would not in any way affect the civil rights of non-Muslims. In the memorandum submitted by the Alliance it was stated: 'The religion of Malaysia shall be Islam. The observance of this principle shall not impose any disability on non-Muslim nationals professing and practicing their own religions and shall not imply the State is not a secular State.'²⁰³

Olaf Schumann explains that

According to its constitution, Malaysia is a federation and a secular state. But due to the special position given to the Malays, who usually adhere to Islam, Islam is declared to be the 'official' religion in the federation - although not necessarily in all

²⁰³. *Federation of Malaya Constitutional Commission, 1956-57 Report* http://www.digitalibrary.my/index.php?view=article&catid=36%3Ahistorical-reports&id=223%3AReport-of-the-the-federation-of-malaya-constitutional-commission&option=com_content&Itemid=23 (accessed 21 March, 2009).

of its member states, which differ in their ethnic and religious composition.

In the 'Constitution of Independence'... Islam was declared to be the 'official religion in the state', it was, however, not the religion 'of the state'. Thus, the federation did not become an Islamic State in which Islamic law would be the constitutional basis of the state and its legislations.²⁰⁴

However, and as we shall see in later sections of this chapter, the character of the Constitution in providing for a secular, pluralistic form of government, stands in tension with the place of Islam in the nation.²⁰⁵ Mention of "other religions" in Article 3 (1) is recognition that although Islam's presence on the Peninsula has a long history, with Muslim traders arriving as early as the tenth century,²⁰⁶ Malaysia "is a kaleidoscope of races with their cultures and religions."²⁰⁷ With a population of 27.17 million,²⁰⁸ Malaysia's main ethnic groups are the Malay who account for 50.5 percent of the population, the Chinese, 23.7 percent, the Indian, 7.1 percent, and indigenous/tribal

^{204.} Olaf Schumann, "Christians and Muslims in Search of Common Ground in Malaysia," *Islam and Christian Muslim Relations* Vol. 2, no. 2 (December, 1991): 242.

^{205.} Daniel K. C. Ho writes that "Malaysia is a secular democracy... The drafters of the Constitution, as well as the nation's founding fathers, made it clear that having Islam as the official religion of the country does not mean that Malaysia is an Islamic state." [Daniel K. C. Ho, "Malaysia" in Scott W. Sunquist ed. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), 513]. We should acknowledge, however, that the description of Malaysia as a secular democracy is not without its difficulties. Non-Muslim communities in Malaysia will, by and large, emphasise the secular character of the Constitution. For these communities a secular democracy is one in which the government accepts restrictions on how it regulates religious life, limits its powers to the secular sphere and refuses to adopt a religious mantle. Such a democracy is neutral but not hostile towards religion. However, the Muslim community tend to associate the term 'secular' with western democracies where religion is marginalised or excluded from the public square. Scholars such as Ng Kam Weng prefer to avoid the term 'secular' and speak instead of *pluralist* democracy. See Ng Kam Weng, "Pluralist Democracy and Spheres of Justice: The Quest for 'Complex Equality' in an Islamic Context" in Mark L. Y. Chan ed. *The Quest for Covenant Community and Pluralist Democracy in an Islamic Context* (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2008), 1-40. Further discussion on this is found below in the sub-section, "Islamisation".

^{206.} See Robert Hunt, *Islam in Southeast Asia: A Study for Christians* (New York / Petaling Jaya: General Board of Global Ministries, The United Methodist Church / Methodist Church of Malaysia, 1997).

^{207.} Moses Ponniah, "The Situation in Malaysia" in *Transformation* Vol. 17, no. 1, (2000): 31-34.

^{208.} Department of Statistics Malaysia, population figures for 2007, http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/frameset_keystats.php (accessed 10 June, 2008).

peoples who form 11 percent of the population.²⁰⁹ Indigenous groups alone demonstrate a staggering diversity with over 80 distinct groups being identified throughout Malaysia, most located in the states of Sarawak and Sabah. Of Malaysia's various ethnic groups those who profess the Islamic faith account for 60.4 percent of the population, with 19.2 percent identifying themselves as Buddhist, 9.1 percent as Christian, 6.3 percent as Hindu, and a further 2.6 percent following Confucianism, Taoism and other traditional Chinese religions.²¹⁰ Although by law all Malays are Muslim and must therefore follow Islam, some Malays have turned to Christianity or to other faiths. Official and accurate statistics for these non-Muslim Malays are impossible to obtain because of the sensitivities (and dangers) involved for those who leave Islam.²¹¹

Malaysians fall into two main groups: the *bumiputera* and the *non-bumiputera*. The term *bumiputera* literally means 'sons of the soil' and designates the 61.5 percent of Malaysians whose origins are held to be indigenous to the country of Malaysia, whether West or East.

²⁰⁹. Statistics for ethnic groups are based on CIA, "The World Fact Book: Malaysia", <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications> (accessed 10 June, 2008). Percentages here are close to those provided by *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, under "World Data"(2006), <http://search.eb.com/analyst> (accessed 21 March, 2009).

²¹⁰. Statistics are taken from Department of Statistics Malaysia, *Population Distribution and Basic Demographic Characteristics Report: Population and Housing Census 2000*. Putrajaya, http://www.statistics.gov.my/English/frameset_keystats.php (accessed 10th June, 2008). A comparison with the 1980 figure of 13.46 million shows an obvious and significant increase in Malaysia's population. This increase has been attributed to two main factors, namely natural growth and migration (mainly from Indonesia and the Philippines). Andaya and Andaya point out, however, that the percentage of Malays within the general population may not be accurate. Census reports over the past twenty years do show that in comparison to other groups, the Malays have a higher fertility rate. But the migration factor has led to some confusion: "the legal definition of a Malay - one who habitually speaks Malay, adheres to Malay customs, and is a follower of Islam - has readily permitted the inclusion of migrants from Indonesia and the southern Philippines, and even individuals from other groups. Population figures can thus be misleading." (Andaya and Andaya, 2001), 3.

²¹¹. Ian Prescott notes that "statistics about Muslims changing religion are a highly charged political issue and thus usually suspect. In addition, many of those who formally change their religion are doing so because of religious inter-marriage rather than out of personal conviction." Ian Prescott, "Creative Access Mission in East Asia" (D.Miss. diss., School of World Mission and Institute of Church Growth, Fuller Theological Seminary, 2001): 91.

These are the Malays (50.5 percent) and the indigenous tribal peoples (11 percent). Saw

Swee-Hock explains:

The term "Bumiputera" was introduced in the pan-Malaysia Censuses to accommodate the emergence of a large variety of indigenous communities after the creation of Malaysia in 1963. The Bumiputra group is now divided into "Malays" and "Other Bumiputeras" in most of the tables presented in the Census Reports. The latter refers mainly to the *orang asli* in West Malaysia and the numerous small indigenous tribes in Sabah and Sarawak.²¹²

Non-bumiputera Malaysians are therefore not 'sons of the soil' of Malaysia because their origins are indigenous to another country, for instance China or India. Broadly speaking, the *bumiputera* group is a combination of Malay, Malay-related and aboriginal (*orang asli*) peoples. Historians make a distinction between the long-established Malays of the east coast of the Peninsula and those Malays who came from Sumatra during the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Other ethnic groups from the surrounding region, sharing similar cultural and linguistic characteristics with the Malay, came to the Peninsula from the mid-nineteenth century onwards. The assimilation of these groups, for example the Javanese, Banjarese, Boyanese, Bugis and Minangkabau into the already established Malay community of the Peninsula was also helped by the fact that they shared the faith of Islam. The *orang asli* (aboriginal people who for the most part live in the rural and jungle areas) are acknowledged as the oldest indigenous population group, concentrated almost entirely on Peninsular Malaysia. The third group included in the *bumiputera* category are the non-Malay peoples of Sarawak and Sabah; ethnic groups such as the Iban and Bidayuh of Sarawak and the Kadazandusun of Sabah.

Given the above statistics and the picture they provide, we can appreciate why the Malaysian Tourist Board should use the slogan, "Malaysia - Truly Asia!" The visitor to Malaysia can almost be guaranteed to experience the great diversity of peoples, cultures

²¹². Saw Swee-Hock, "Population Trends and Patterns in Multiracial Malaysia" in Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany eds. *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2006), 13.

and languages that are scattered across modern Asia. Fredrick Mathewson Denny has described Malaysia as “one relatively small but diverse and complex modern nation.”²¹³ Its diversity and geographical location make it “a crossroad of the world’s religions.”²¹⁴ A survey of the historical landscape of Malaysia will help us appreciate something of how this diversity has come about.²¹⁵

Historical Perspectives

Of necessity historians engage in a selection process which omits certain material and includes others, and this is guided by the overall aims and intentions of the writer.

Accounts of Malaysia’s historical past can generally be divided into two main and distinctively different perspectives. Malaysian historian Lee Kam Hing explains:

These are not only historiographically important but also significant because they determine the way Malaysians have viewed themselves and their past. These form part of the historical memory of the individual and they influence the manner in which Malaysians regard the other communities.²¹⁶

The first of these perspectives sees the beginnings of modern Malaysia originating with the arrival of the British and the coming of various immigrant communities during the nineteenth century under colonial rule. The most important event in this view is the signing of the Pangkor Treaty of 1874 because this is the point at which real political governance was established in the shape of the British rule of law and administration. This treaty paved the way for economic growth, industrialisation, migration, population growth,

²¹³. Fredrick Mathewson Denny in Raymond L. M. Lee and Susan F. Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia* (University of South Carolina Press, 1997), viii.

²¹⁴. Lee and Ackerman, *Sacred Tensions*, 1.

²¹⁵. The reader should note that at times in this chapter the term ‘Malaysia’ is used to designate pre-independence areas which would only later take this name. The anachronism is used for the sake of convenience.

²¹⁶. Lee Kam Hing, “From Communities to Nation,” in *The Christian and Race Relations in Malaysia*, eds. Michael Moey, Kwan Yoke Lin, Keat Peng (Graduates Christian Fellowship: Petaling Jaya, 1986), 22.

urbanisation and accompanying systems of health care and education. This, according to Lee, is the “European-centric” perspective of Malaysian history.

The second historical perspective locates the origins of modern Malaysia much further back than the mid-nineteenth century. In this view the defining moment is the establishing of Malacca in the fifteenth century. Prince Parameswara from Sumatra established Malacca and the Malay Sultanate of Malacca in 1394. For the next century, Malacca became the centre of a great Malay empire with prosperous trading routes also serving to spread the Islamic faith. This Malaysia-centric perspective understands the fifteenth century as that period when certain core aspects of modern day Malaysia began to take shape. Political and social institutions, language and the Islamic faith all evolved in the fifteenth century as important cultural symbols and identity markers for the Malays. With a maritime empire based in Malacca it was in many ways inevitable that “the Malay language became the lingua franca of the region and Islam... energetically spread.”²¹⁷ The Malay world extended to include not only the Malay Peninsula, but also Indonesia, parts of the Philippines and the southern areas of modern Thailand. The interaction of the peoples in these various places took the form of trade, diplomacy, migration and conflict. And such interaction strengthens the view that there is a historical basis for appreciating a greater continuity between the Malacca Sultanate and modern day Malaysia.

The decline of the Malay Sultanate and the central place of Malacca in the Malay Archipelago is attributed to the arrival of the Portuguese in 1509, with Malacca falling in 1511. Whereas the Euro-centric perspective sees the decline of Malay dominance and the

²¹⁷ Lee Kam Hing, “From Communities to Nation”, 22.

ascendancy of European influence as a decisive turning point, the Malaysia-centric view emphasises the idea of continuity, seeing the Malay influence in political and economic systems enduring into the seventeenth century through the establishing of new centres of Malay trade in Johor, Aceh and Brunei. And these two historical perspectives continue to shape the thinking of many Malaysians whose understanding of the past deeply influences how they view themselves and others. As Lee points out, "The arguments about their rights and responsibilities as citizens of the country centre around the perception of the role and contribution of the various communities in the country."²¹⁸ Non-Malays find the Euro-centric framework attractive because it recognises their role in contributing to the building of the nation. In recognition of their contribution to Malaysia's economic development, non-Malays argue for greater equality in terms of political rights. They also look on the nation's swift development over the last twenty-five years as having brought about new social and cultural realities which necessitate a level playing field for all. But this Euro-centric reading of Malaysia's history has led to a reduced understanding and appreciation of the culture and history of the Malays. On the other hand, when we consider those who take a Malaysian-centric view of history we find a framework that views non-Malays as recent immigrants who came to a region where cultural symbols and identity had already been established. Therefore, if new people come to live in this 'Malay world', and want to participate in the political arena, then they have to be prepared to accept those cultural symbols of identity - for instance speaking the national language and acknowledging the special place of the Malays and of Islam in Malaysia.

Tensions remain in today's Malaysia between those who recognise that the nation's 'real' history does not begin with the arrival of the European colonising powers and those who

²¹⁸ Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 23.

on the other hand appreciate that the communities who came as a result of the European influence have actually contributed to the development of modern day Malaysia. Many Malaysians now recognise that the task of nation building, including progress towards national unity, will require “a fair amalgamation of all elements from the various communities.”²¹⁹

Early Malaysian History

It is common to find historical accounts of Malaysia beginning with the founding of Malacca, the famous entrepôt on the west coast of the Malay Peninsula. And there is good reason for this, given the availability of historical sources, mainly indigenous Malay and colonial records. A lack of information has prevented much detailed consideration of the pre-Malacca period but recent scholarly research has now enabled at least some reconstruction of Malaysia’s early history. One of the most accessible sources of information and analysis about this period is *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia*. Written to redress the imbalance in the historical record, volume four opens with these words:

Malaysia’s prehistory begins with the earliest known traces of human habitation around 40 millenniums ago, and extends through the protohistoric period to the founding of the Malacca Sultanate in 1400 CE, the date commonly used as the starting point of the historic era. Because so much has been written about Malacca and its significance in Malaysian history, the long period preceding it has been overshadowed, and outside of academic circles little is known about the rich archaeological heritage of prehistoric Malaysia.²²⁰

The difficulties in working with the available sources are formidable:

Painstaking research has unearthed numerous references to the Malay world before 1400, scattered through Indian, Chinese and Arab sources, but the linguistic skills required to exploit these are daunting.²²¹

²¹⁹. Lee Kam Hing, “From Communities to Nation”, 23.

²²⁰. *Encyclopaedia of Malaysia* Vol. 4 “Early History” ed. Prof. Dato’ Dr. Nik Hassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), 6. The volume contains a wealth of material written by specialists covering Malaysia’s prehistory and up to the early Islamic period.

²²¹. Barbara Watson Andaya and Leonard Y. Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 2nd Edition

It is in those Arabic and Chinese documents that scholars have found information about the earliest settlements in Malaysia. Identifying the exact modern day locations mentioned in these documents has proved difficult but more recent discoveries have pointed to human settlements located in Kedah, Terengganu, Kelantan, Perak and Pahang. For instance, in the nineteenth century, Colonel James Low (1791-1852) found “the relics of a Hindoo colony” in Kedah.²²² Scholars, while doubtful of the existence of actual Indian colonies in Kedah, are confident of substantial Indian influence given the large number of archaeological sites which have revealed temple remains in that part of Malaysia. Kedah seems to have been the focus of Indian commercial interests on the peninsula.

In current opinion, it is now considered most likely that the major group responsible for the introduction of South Asian cultural traits to Southeast Asia were the Southeast Asian merchants themselves. Trade between South and Southeast Asia was a two-way affair, and Southeast Asians were active and expert seafarers. However, if the merchants of South Asia were not the main party responsible for cultural evolution in Southeast Asia, they were certainly present in early Malaysia. The best evidence that Indian traders visited early Malaysia comes from Indian literature, in Sanskrit verse or Tamil court poetry. Southeast Asia appears in such genres as collections of fairy tales and Buddhist texts. In general, these tales portray Southeast Asia as a land of promise where ambitious traders might make their fortunes.²²³

In the state of Terengganu the famous Terengganu Stone was erected by a Muslim ruler during the fourteenth century and is the earliest known example of Malay written in Jawi script. Such monuments and archaeological finds are rare in Malaysia due to the speed of decay in the tropical climate. Encouraging recent finds have included the early human remains found in Perak in 1990. “Perak man” is a complete skeleton, and to date the oldest evidence of human burial in Peninsular Malaysia. This together with various prehistoric tools found in caves in Perak and Kelantan have been dated from between 13,000 and

(Basinstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 7.

²²². See Paul Wheatley, *The Golden Khersonese* (Kuala Lumpur, 1961), 273.

²²³. John Miksic, “Indian Traders”, in *Encyclopaedia of Malaysia*, Vol. 4 “Early History” ed. Prof. Dato’ Dr. Nik Nassan Shuhaimi Nik Abdul Rahman (Singapore: Archipelago Press, 1998), 80-81.

2,000 years ago. The identity and origin of these human settlers is hotly debated, and such questions take on added significance in a country where the population is divided into those who are 'sons of the soil' and those who are not. Explanations regarding the origins of Malaysia's diverse ethnicities are noted by Andaya and Andaya:

Scientific analysis of... skeletal remains suggests that early inhabitants of the Peninsula were genetically linked to the smaller and darker northern Orang Asli (the so-called Negritos) of contemporary Malaysia, who would thus appear to have a truly local ancestry, and with the Senoi, who display stronger connections with Neolithic societies in southern and central Thailand. But explanations for the variations in appearance and lifestyle of Peninsular populations are divided between those who see cultural and biological shifts occurring locally, and those who place greater emphasis on immigration from elsewhere in the region.²²⁴

This tension between the local and the alien, the indigenous and the migrant, is a recurring theme throughout Malaysia's history with "the chronology of human habitation and the history of language development" continuing to be a contested issue.²²⁵

The Importance of Trade

A further recurring theme, with origins pre-dating the founding of Malacca and which has in many ways shaped the history of the entire region, is that of trade. For centuries before the founding of Malacca, the Malay archipelago had become a strategic location and part

^{224.} Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 9.

^{225.} See Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 9; Also Peter Bellwood, "Cultural and Biological Differentiation in Peninsular Malaysia: The Last 10,000 Years," *Asian Perspectives* 32, no. 1 (1993); and Peter Bellwood, "Prehistory," in *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia* Vol. 4 (1998), 10-19. It should be noted that on this topic Peninsular Malaysia has a different history from that of East Malaysian Borneo. In Peter Bellwood's view "3,000-4,000 years ago Austronesian-speaking peoples from Taiwan dispersed through the islands of Southeast Asia fundamentally altering the human shape of Malaysia. All the indigenous Borneans today are Austronesians, who perhaps first colonised Borneo 3,500 years ago, as evidenced by finds in Sabah at the Madai Caves and at Bukit Tengkorak, and in the Niah and Mulu Caves of Sarawak. Peninsular Malaysia is quite different, and much more diverse ethnically. Among the Orang Asli, the Negritos probably descend from the tool-makers of the Hoabinhian cultural period, whereas the ancestry of the Senoi agriculturalists may derive from people practising a mixed Hoabinhian and Neolithic culture, the latter involving migrations from Thailand 4,000 years ago. Both groups speak Austroasiatic languages unrelated to Austronesian. The Malays are Austronesians, but it is not sure when they first settled in the Malay Peninsula... The first major spread of the Malay language might have occurred during the period of Srivijaya after 670 CE. At a similar date, Malay perhaps first spread to Borneo as a trade language." *Encyclopaedia of Malaysia*, Vol. 4 (1998), 11.

of a trading network in Southeast Asia connecting Africa to China. Two major sea routes converged on the archipelago, and by using the annual monsoon systems, trade flourished to India and China.

In addition to its location, the Malay archipelago was rich in natural resources. While its jungles offered various forest products, its coasts and surrounding oceans produced an incredible variety of tradeable goods. For instance,

by the fifth century CE Chinese sources provide evidence that tortoiseshell and cowries were a well-established component in Malay trade... Later the list of sea products grew as the Chinese market developed, including such items as the rare black branching coral known to the Malays as *akar bahar* and the famed *teripang* or sea slug, used as an ingredient in Chinese cooking and medicinal preparations.²²⁶

The most valuable resources of the archipelago however, were its base and precious metals such as gold and tin. The Malay Peninsula is home to the world's largest tin fields and at one time had a reputation for its gold deposits.

With trade came the development of relationships with peoples from other lands. One of the earliest trading relationships was between the peoples of the Malay archipelago and those from India. India's trading networks in Southeast Asia have been traced as far back as 200 BC. What exactly the Indians desired to purchase from the inhabitants of the Peninsula is unknown, but what the Indian traders left behind in terms of influence has been well documented: the influence of the religions of Buddhism and Hinduism, seen not least in the adoption of words from Sanskrit and Indic origin into the Malay language - for instance the Sanskrit words '*bahasa*' (language), '*raja*' (ruler), and Indic words '*jaya*' (success), '*merdeka*' (independent, powerful), '*puasa*' (to fast), '*dosa*' (sin). Indian influence can also be seen on ideas of political governance, and in the literature and

²²⁶ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 11.

culture of the Malay. Compared to the later relationship the Malay communities developed with Chinese traders, the influence from India proved more profound and long-lasting.

The localisation of Indian influences by early Malay communities proceeded imperceptibly, deepening and enriching an already vital culture. While the later trade with China introduced a wide range of objects and some technological skills, the relationship with India was in many ways richer. Not only did it provide local élites with a more refined and elaborated version of a fundamentally similar outlook on life; it also laid the groundwork for the transference of Islamic beliefs which were indeed to transform Malay society.²²⁷

Up until the fifth century AD, China's trade networks were largely land-based. This began to change with political developments in southern China where the Liu Song Dynasty gained control in 420 AD. Overland trade routes became unavailable and so transportation by sea took on more importance. However, because ocean-going vessels were not developed by China until the eighth and ninth centuries the Chinese had to rely on surrounding maritime peoples to carry out the actual shipping. The entrance of the Chinese into the trading networks of Southeast Asia coincided with the growing need for good ports in the Malay archipelago. The favoured location became the Malacca Straits. Not only were the waters famously calm but the Straits provided the ideal resting place for ships and their crews who had to wait for the monsoon winds to change in order to return home. Historical sources mention ports such as Gantuoli, believed to have been located on the south-east coast of Sumatra, and the more historically intriguing Srivijaya, which is believed to have been a maritime kingdom of great importance sometime between the seventh and thirteenth century, and also located in south-east Sumatra. But as trade grew so did competition and a number of ports vied for influence around the Malacca Straits. Srivijaya's prominence and authority waned for various reasons and the centre of power moved eventually to Malacca. It is important to recognise, however, the degree of

²²⁷. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 16.

continuity that existed between the two locations, particularly in terms of the developing self-understanding of Malay culture. As historians Andaya and Andaya describe,

it is in the written sources associated with south-east Sumatra and Srivijaya that the term 'Melayu' first emerges, and it is here that Old Malay was first written in the courtly Pallava script introduced from India... Of particular significance is the suggestion that local people were themselves adopting the term 'Malay' as a self-referent.²²⁸

It was noted above that Malaysia's diversity and geographical location make it "a crossroad of the world's religions". Our historical survey so far has underlined the fact that this diversity, this understanding of Malaysia as a great intersection of faiths and cultures, far from being the result of some recent phenomenon such as colonialism, is the result of centuries long interaction among various peoples in the Asia region. Malacca became the geographical focal point for this interaction and we now turn look at its founding.

²²⁸. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 28.



Figure 2.1: Map illustrating European trade routes to the East Indies²²⁹

The Founding of Malacca

The founding of Malacca is one of the great historical landmarks in the story of Malaysia.

It is from this period in the fifteenth century that we have the beginnings of a recorded

history of Malaysia. According to Tomé Pires, the Portuguese author of the *Suma Oriental*,

²²⁹ Map by Eman Bowen, *An Accurate Map of the East Indies exhibiting the Course of the European Trade both on the Continent and Islands - Drawn from the best modern maps and charts and adjusted by astronomical observations*. c. 1750. Courtesy of Lucian de Guise, Curator, Islamic Arts Museum, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Malacca in the fifteenth century was “of such importance and profit that it seems to me it has no equal in the world”.

There are two main accounts about how Malacca was founded. One comes from the *Suma Oriental* of Tomé Pires, the other from the *Sejarah Melayu* or the ‘History of the Malays’. The latter is not a detailed record of historical events but better understood as a genre of Malay literature. That is not to say the *Sejarah Melayu* has not been of use to historians; we shall note its importance shortly. But for now, and as a flavour of how this important piece of literature approaches things, we will briefly summarise its striking account of the origins of Malacca and its connection with the Palembang prince, Parameswara. The *Sejarah Melayu* provides a long genealogy tracing the Malacca kings all the way back to Alexander the Great, who in this account is a Muslim king, Iskander Dzu’l-Karnain. It is then explained that three of Alexander the Great’s descendants from India appeared supernaturally on a sacred hill in Palembang, Sumatra. One of them, Seri Teri Buana (equated with Parameswara) was made the ruler of Palembang. Seri Teri Buana eventually left Palembang in search of a suitable location to build a city. Arriving on the island of Temasek he established the “Lion City” - Singapura, after having seen a strange beast which he takes to be a Lion (‘singa’). Seri Teri Buana’s descendants remain in Singapura for a further five generations before the settlement moves north. The *Sejarah Melayu* describes how while out hunting, Sultan Iskandar saw a mouse-deer kick one of his hounds. Such unusual mouse-deer behaviour prompted him to choose the location as a settlement, and since he was standing under a ‘Malacca’ tree, the location was named Malacca.

There are major differences between the two accounts, and these can largely be explained by their differing purposes. But agreement can be found on key aspects of the story. Scholars now speak of Malacca as a settlement founded around the year 1400 by a Hindu-Buddhist prince Parameswara of Palembang. The prince had to flee from Palembang to Temasek following a failed attempt to gain independence from the Javanese. Having to leave Temasek because of either Javanese or Thai invaders, he finally resided in Malacca. “Backed by his loyal ‘navy’ of Orang Laut (sea and river peoples) and his impeccable Malay pedigree, he was able to establish a port which quickly became the most prosperous trading city in Southeast Asia.”²³⁰ The early success of Parameswara’s leadership was also due to the Chinese protection he sought and received for his kingdom and the benefits this quickly brought for both the Chinese and Malacca in terms of trade.

Three aspects of Malacca’s influence can be highlighted: first, its success as an entrepôt, then its influence on patterns of Malay governance and identity, and thirdly, the entrepôt’s role in spreading Islam throughout island Southeast Asia.

Malacca as a Centre for International Trade

A number of factors ensured the success of Malacca as a centre for international trade. Its location provided easy access to fresh water and supplies of wood. The hill overlooking the estuary made it a more defensible location compared to other ports in the region. Foreign merchants felt safe in Malacca and found its facilities, such as underground warehouses, second to none. Malacca was also able to guard its shipping lanes due to strategic alliances with groups of Orang Laut who provided protection against piracy. The

²³⁰ John Miksic, “From Srivijaya to Temasek to Malacca,” in *The Encyclopaedia of Malaysia* Volume 4 (1998), 123.

port gained a reputation for having a well organised and reliable administration and this was attractive to foreign traders who required a certain amount of predictability given the necessity of making long-term travel and trading plans. For reasons such as the following, Malacca stood out from other regional trading ports:

The fundamental element in Malacca's success as an entrepôt was the dual role it played as the principal collecting point for cloves from Maluku and the nutmeg and mace of the Banda Islands, and as an important redistribution centre for Indian textiles from Gujarat, Coromandel, Malabar and Bengal... Without the Indian cloth or the spices, Malacca would have been simply one of a number of other ports in the area specialising in a few local products... At any one time there were upward of 2000 boats lying at anchor in the harbour.²³¹

Malacca's Influence on Governance and Identity

Malacca was strategic in influencing patterns of Malay governance and in shaping Malay identity. Ancient Malay governance is traced to Malacca and it has been said that "the nature of the state and how it should ideally function" was "one of the most impressive achievements of the Malacca court."²³² For Lee Kam Hing, "It was only with the founding of Malacca in 1400 that a more structured and sustained polity first came into existence and marked the beginning of the recorded history of Malaysia."²³³

Before the fifteenth century and the coming of Islam, nothing like a 'nation' or 'state' existed in Southeast Asia. Instead, a key centre of power exercised control over a loosely connected geographical area. In the Malay world such political formations were known as 'negara' polity. Rulers legitimised their authority not by emphasising so much their ethnic identity or their standing in the community, but by their inclusion in lists of important genealogies which linked them to great dynasties and empires of the past. Herein lies the

²³¹. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 46.

²³². Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 46.

²³³. Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 24.

significance of the great genealogy with which the *Sejarah Melayu* begins, and why it was originally called the *Sulalat al-Salatin*, the Genealogy of Kings. As Anthony Johns puts it, “No court epic of the region was complete without a prolegomena detailing such ancestry, bestowing the king with the functions ‘to link the past with the future and to give human life its appropriate place in the cosmic order’.”²³⁴ Political culture at this time was centred in the role and authority of the ruler, indeed the unity of the society was founded on it. Political culture was therefore “fundamentally vertical and hierarchical”.²³⁵ The place of the ‘raja’ at the heart of governance is reflected in the Malay term for government, ‘kerajaan’, which is still in use today. The relationship between subjects and ruler became encapsulated in a social contract which served to reinforce the exalted place of the Sultan. This covenant “was based upon the bestowment of virtually unlimited powers on the Sultan - he was even expressly endowed with the right to oppress his subjects - in return for relatively paltry guarantees...”²³⁶ Even in today’s political discourse criticism of the Malaysian government is often equated (especially in the minds of the rulers) with disloyalty to country. Various legends contained in Malay literature describe the punishments meted out for treason against the ruler - an act equivalent to sinning against God: a man found guilty of treason, “along with his family, would be killed, his house uprooted, and the soil on which it stood thrown into the sea.”²³⁷ Happily, such does not happen in today’s Malaysia, though plenty of scope for punishment does exist in the controversial provision of the ISA (Internal Security Act). The Malacca Sultanate

²³⁴. Anthony H. Johns, “The role of structural organisation and myth in Javanese historiography”, *Journal of Asian Studies* 24, no 1 (1964): 91-99.

²³⁵. Graham K. Brown, “The Formation and Management of Political Identities: Indonesia and Malaysia Compared”, *Working Paper* no. 10, Centre for Research on Inequality, Human Security and Ethnicity, CRISE, Queen Elizabeth House, University of Oxford (February 2005): 3.

²³⁶. Brown, “Political Identities”, 5.

²³⁷. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 47.

developed an administrative structure with a hierarchy of four officials handling the day-to-day aspects of government, and under them various other low-ranking officials.

The nature of the Malacca court and how it was run played an important role in the shaping of the Malay worldview. The ruler personified the heritage of 'Melayu' - a prestige tied to that word's origins in Sumatra. It is debatable the extent to which we can talk about a Malay community existing at this time²³⁸ but a group identity, a sense of 'Malayness' seems to have existed, "premised primarily on the notion of 'kerajaan' - the condition of being a subject of the Sultan."²³⁹

It has also been observed that the first group of settlers who established Malacca were fairly diverse. The Buddhist-Hindu prince, Parameswara, was accompanied by a group of Orang Laut followers. Local, 'native Malays', in the Malacca district at first kept their distance but eventually links via the local women were established because there were few women among the newcomers. There was, as Andaya and Andaya point out, an assimilatory feature to Malacca's society from the beginning:

Only by incorporating local groups into the Melayu system of governance and society and persuading them to accept the authority of its rulers could the early kings of Malacca establish a secure position and ensure the prosperity of their young settlement.²⁴⁰

An example of how the growing diversity of Malacca's society was successfully managed can be seen in the role of the *shahbandar*. Though the *shahbandar* had responsibilities that far exceed it, the nearest modern-day equivalent to this role is perhaps that of the

^{238.} See Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 23.

^{239.} Brown "Political Identities", 5.

^{240.} Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 48.

harbourmaster. As Malacca's reputation grew, so the port became more cosmopolitan. To ensure that trading relationships and the affairs of the different communities were attended to, four *shahbandars* were appointed, each with responsibility for a different ethnic group. They looked after the marketplace and storage facilities, kept a check on weights, measures and coinage and helped settle disputes. According to Lee Kam Hing, the foreign communities lived in specified sections of the city, and although the cosmopolitan population was substantial, the actual population of Malacca remained small.²⁴¹

A third major influence associated with Malacca is the entrepôt's role in spreading Islam throughout the Southeast Asian archipelago. We shall devote the next section of this chapter to underlining some important aspects of Islam's arrival.

The Arrival of Islam

The expansion of Islam across island Southeast Asia has been described as "the second expansion of Islam", the first being its original expansion in the Middle East and North Africa. A. H. Johns points out how this second expansion differed from the first:

Unlike that first period of extraordinary growth in the seventh century, however, the spread of Islam in Southeast Asia was hesitant, modest, and discreet: what was achieved in one century in the Middle East took at least half a millennium in Southeast Asia.²⁴²

There is little evidence of Islam's presence in Southeast Asia before the tenth century. By the eleventh century Muslim traders had reached the region and there are reports from travellers such as Marco Polo in 1292 and Ibn Battuta in 1345 that Islam had been embraced by the people of Sumatra.²⁴³ By the thirteenth century there is clear evidence of

^{241.} Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 24.

^{242.} A. H. Johns, "Islam in Southeast Asia" in *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed. Lindsay Jones, Vol. 7, 2nd ed. (Detroit: Macmillan Reference USA, 2005), 4659.

^{243.} M. B. Hooker (ed), *Islam in South-East Asia*, (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1988), 4, 5.

Muslim communities ruled by sultans and organised under a form of Islamic polity. This gradual spread of Islam and its consolidation means, as Johns puts it, “there is no ‘big bang’ explanation for the coming of Islam to Southeast Asia.”²⁴⁴

Islam and Trade: Inextricably Bound

Exactly how Islam came to these communities is not known but scholars agree that a “direct relationship between trade and the spread of Islam is undeniable.”²⁴⁵ The maritime history of the Indian Ocean suggests that there were Muslim sailors working on ships plying the trade routes around the archipelago as early as the eighth century. As trade increased and connections with ports and peoples were strengthened, so the Muslim presence grew. In their book, *Spice Journeys: Taste and Trade in the Islamic World*, de Guise and Sutarwala write that “Islam and hospitality go together like coffee and cardamon. Islam and trade have also been inextricably bound since the time of the Prophet Muhammad.”²⁴⁶ It would have been quite natural for Muslim sailors and traders to form Muslim communities of one kind or another, even where semi-permanent settlements were established. Therefore, Islam spread to the region, not to begin with by the intentional efforts of Islamic missionaries, but through merchants. But we pause here to note some difference of opinion. What was it that motivated the expansion of Islam: making profits or making converts? McAmis cites Sir Thomas Arnold who argued that traders came primarily with a view to presenting the teachings of Muhammad and not to make a profit. But others have questioned this view:

Indeed, given the absence of Islamic ‘missionaries’, in the sense of the Christian missionaries from Europe, it has been suggested that it was the existence of a

²⁴⁴. Johns, "Islam in South East Asia", 4660.

²⁴⁵. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 54.

²⁴⁶. Lucien de Guise and Zahir Sutarwala, *Spice Journeys: Taste and Trade in the Islamic World* (Kuala Lumpur: Islamic Arts Museum Malaysia, 2006), 7.

coherent and comprehensive body of law relating to commercial transactions in the Islamic doctrines, along with the potential to improve trading relations with the Arab empires, that provided the first step in the local adoption of Islamic practices, rather than any 'spiritual' conversion.²⁴⁷

It may be best to see with McAmis that "there were different motives in different merchants and even mixed motives in some."²⁴⁸ We can say, however, that Islam was embraced in Southeast Asia not least because of the significant commercial benefits it offered: "historians generally agree that proselytisation was closely linked to trade, which in this period was dominated by Muslims from India."²⁴⁹ And Indian Muslims, especially those from Gujarat, had been influential in Malacca from the thirteenth century onwards, playing a pivotal role in Malacca's emergence not just as an important trading centre but in its eventual rise to become "the greatest Islamic empire of Southeast Asia"²⁵⁰ and a conduit for Muslim influence throughout the archipelago.

Thus Islam made its first appearance in the Malayan Peninsula in the fourteenth century. Malacca was the first state that became Muslim. It was from Malacca that Islam continued its spread to the islands of Southeast Asia.²⁵¹

This may explain how Islam was introduced, but the details of that process and what it involved are still largely unknown. It is possible, however, to identify factors which help

²⁴⁷. Brown, "Political Identities", 4.

²⁴⁸. McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam*, 12

²⁴⁹. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 42. R. O. Windstedt writes of the pervasive influence of India on the Malay world: "With a little exaggeration it has been said of Europe that it owes its theology, its literature, and its science to Greece; with no greater exaggeration it may be said of the Malayan races that until the 19th century they owed everything to India: religions, a political system, medieval astrology and medicine, literature, arts and crafts." R. O. Windstedt, "Indian Influence in the Malay World," *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* (1944): 186, quoted by McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 8-9, fn 2.

²⁵⁰. Brown, "Political Identities", 4.

²⁵¹. McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 16, citing S. F. Mahmud, *A Short History of Islam* (London: Oxford University Press, 1960), 281.

explain Islam's significant expansion in Southeast Asia. We will single out three for special mention.

Events in the Wider Islamic World

First, events in the wider Islamic world had a positive influence in the expansion of the faith in Southeast Asia. During the eleventh and twelfth centuries Islamic traders brought a form of Islam associated with the Abbasid dynasty - highly orthodox and with strict adherence to rituals and beliefs. It did not fit comfortably with the syncretistic religious world of Southeast Asia. Political power was concentrated in the caliphs of the dynasty, and therefore the rulers of the kingdoms of island Southeast Asia could have no share in that authority. But changes began to happen in the Islamic world. Hastened by the fall of the Abbasid dynasty, Muslim rulers across the Islamic world began asserting their independence. In the Islamic world of Southeast Asia, the local rulers, *sultans*, saw the benefit in adopting Islam and so obtaining greater spiritual and political authority. Robert Hunt writes:

Alongside benefits for trade and acquiring political allies, this made embracing Islam an attractive possibility in kingdoms which had previously shown little interest in the religion.²⁵²

Sufism: the Mystical Search for God

A second factor at work in the reception of Islam in Southeast Asia was Sufism. Fatimi explains:

The second half of the 13th century saw a great upsurge of the Sufi evangelical movement throughout the world of Islam, and this was the main factor in the spread of Islam in Malaysia.²⁵³

^{252.} Robert A. Hunt, *Islam in Southeast Asia: A study for Christians* (New York / Petaling Jaya: General Board of Global Ministries of the United Methodist Church and the Methodist Church of Malaysia, 1997), 12.

^{253.} Fatimi (1963), 23.

Sufism is a mystical movement within Islam emphasising a deeper awareness of God's presence:

Stressing contemplation over action, spiritual development over legalism, and cultivation of the soul over social interaction. In contrast to the academic exercises of theology and jurisprudence, which depend on reason, Sufism depends on emotion and imagination in the divine-human relationship.²⁵⁴

Without rejecting orthodox Islamic beliefs and practices, Sufism emphasises the inward, personal experience and union with God. Sufi teachers sought to make the transcendent God of Islam spiritually real and relevant to the populations of Southeast Asia. The mystics themselves demonstrated an attractive spirituality, and although opposed by Islamic orthodoxy, "Sufism has supplied Islam's greatest missionaries to win converts in Africa, India, and Indonesia."²⁵⁵ One scholar writes of the Sufi influence on the people of Malaya:

I am inclined to believe that it was the Sufis who actually propagated and finally made it possible for Islam to become established among the people. With regard to Malaya, I feel almost certain that Islam was propagated by the Sufis. There may not be direct evidence to support this theory, but it is valid to the extent that there is circumstantial evidence in its support.²⁵⁶

Orthodox Islam as represented in Malaysia today is not keen to draw attention to the role of Sufism in the Malay reception of Islam, but its influence seems undeniable.²⁵⁷

²⁵⁴. *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, ed. John L. Esposito (Oxford University Press Inc. 2003), s.v. "Sufism," *Oxford Reference Online*. Oxford University Press, Open University, <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e2260> (accessed 13 February 2009).

²⁵⁵. McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 17.

²⁵⁶. Syed Naguib Al-Attas, *Some Aspects of Sufism as Understood and Practised Among the Malays*, Edited by Shirle Gordon (Singapore: Malaysian Sociological Research Institute Ltd, 1963), 21. Robert A. Hunt explains the attractiveness of the Sufi interpretation of Islam: "For both rulers and their subjects existing animistic beliefs were overlaid, rather than replaced, by an Islamic faith which addressed their needs and fears in a way which they could understand." (1997), 14,15.

²⁵⁷. Objections to Sufism generally take the following approach: "Some modern observers have proclaimed the effective end of the Sufi order, claiming that mystical religious experience and modernity are incompatible. Politically minded Muslim have made Sufism the scapegoat for Islam's alleged backwardness in comparison with the West, claiming that Sufism, as the religion of the common people, embodied superstition and un-Islamic elements adopted from local cultures. Eradication of Sufism was believed necessary in order for Islam to reclaim its birthright, including modern science and technology." *Oxford Dictionary of Islam*, s.v. "Sufism," <http://www.oxfordreference.com/views/ENTRY.html?subview=Main&entry=t125.e2260> (accessed 13 February 2009).

Western Powers Seeking Access to the Spice Trade

A third factor in Islam's expansion across Southeast Asia is found in the coming of Western European powers. Seeking access to the lucrative spice trade and the other natural resources, and with the aim of controlling the trade routes, the first of these powers arrived in the early sixteenth century, when the Portuguese captured Malacca in 1511. Then came the Spanish who arrived in the Philippines in 1565, conquering the port of Manilla in 1571. The Dutch entered the spice trade by securing an agreement in 1600 with the chief of Ambonia, and then in 1640 capturing the fort at Malacca from the Portuguese. The Dutch ultimately lost control of the spice trade to the British who, in the eighteenth century, took control of Penang in 1786 and Singapore in 1819 and from there extended their rule to the interior of the Malay Peninsula.

With these successive waves of colonial power dominating Southeast Asia it might be thought that Islam's expansion would have been halted, its influence curbed. The reality, however, was quite the reverse: "Islam was actually motivated and aided in its spread and penetration by the arrival of Western Christian powers from Europe."²⁵⁸ Any thought that those European powers might have encouraged the growth of Christianity must reckon with the following stark summary of the Portuguese:

The Portuguese have been described... as swarming into Asia in a spirit of open brigandage. Against the Muslim peoples their crusading zeal stimulated rather than restrained their cruel and capricious behaviour. Even their own historians were ashamed at their crimes in the Moluccas where the natives were driven into resistance by the injustice of their trading methods. And although priests and monks multiplied in their dominions, they were ineffectual missionaries because of the misdeeds of traders and freebooters.²⁵⁹

²⁵⁸. McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 25.

²⁵⁹. D. G. E. Hall, *A History of Southeast Asia* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), 206 and cited in McAmis (2002), 25.

Not all the European powers may have had such a dismal record, but even the great Portuguese missionary Francis Xavier was reported to have “left Malacca in disgust after a short stay when he learnt of the widespread corruption among the officials.”²⁶⁰

Whether it was Sumatra, the Malay Peninsula, Brunei or the other parts of the archipelago, the spread of Islam continued even with the arrival of the colonial powers. For as Lee puts it, “Christianity became associated with western political domination and economic exploitation. Islam in turn came to represent a rallying point in most resistance to colonialism.”²⁶¹ The one exception was the Philippines under the policies of the Spanish, who, we must not forget, in contrast to the other colonial powers had lived under some form of Muslim control for seven hundred years. In all other parts of the region, the arrival of Western powers proved ultimately to encourage rather than dissipate, the Muslim advance.

Colonialism - the Forming of a Plural Society

Our concern here is not with the details of European colonial expansion in Asia, but to paint in broad strokes the general context out of which colonialism arose and then to focus our attention on the British colonial rule of Malaysia and what difference that made to the shaping of the country.

^{260.} Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 24. A similar picture emerges from Xavier's experiences in South India where, according to the historian Stephen Neill, Xavier had to suffer, among other things, "the evil lives and violence of the Portuguese." Stephen Neill, *A History of Christian Missions* (London: Penguin Books, 1986), 129

^{261.} Lee Kam Hing, "From Communities to Nation", 24.

European powers arrived in Asia as a result of two motivating factors. The first was linked to the desire to halt the expansion of Islam and to take the conflict with Islam beyond the geographical context of Europe. The second motive was the desire to control trade and have access particularly to the riches of India and to the “Spice Islands”. Europe in the Middle Ages was hemmed in by Islam which, with the fall of Constantinople in 1453, stretched in an unbroken line from Central Asia to Spain. But with the opening up of the sea route to India by Vasco da Gama, and then Columbus ‘discovering’ the Americas, the Age of Discovery dawned for Europe. The route to India, via the southern tip of Africa, allowed the Portuguese and Spanish access to trade routes long dominated by Muslims. And so, as David Bosch writes, “These events, at the close of the fifteenth century, inaugurated a completely new period in world history: Europe’s colonisation of the people of Africa, Asia, and the Americas.”²⁶² A fair summary of things in general is that “the predominant motivation behind colonialism was the striving after economic profit, and religion quite often was used as a pretext and propaganda tool.”²⁶³

The Arrival of the British to Malaya

We must now direct our attention to the arrival of the British to Malaya in the late 18th century. Until then and except for Malacca, Western influence in Malaya and northern Borneo had been relatively insignificant. But major changes were to take place from this point onwards. Britain gained its first strategic foothold with the establishment of a settlement on Penang, an offshore island of the Malayan Peninsula, in 1786, followed in 1819 by the founding of Singapore. Together with Malacca, obtained from the Dutch in 1824, these three ports enabled the British to form the Straits Settlements - bases from

²⁶². David Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Maryknoll, 1991), 226.

²⁶³. *A Dictionary of Asian Christianity* ed. Scott W. Sunquist (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2001), s.v. “Colonialism.”

which they could pursue regional economic and political goals, including the opportunity to penetrate into the interior of the Malay peninsula. Penang and Singapore became increasingly successful trading centres, attracting Chinese traders from the surrounding region, as well as from China itself. From these two centres, the Chinese began extending their trading activities to include the Malay states and forming alliances with Malay chiefs. Much of this trading activity focused on tin, new deposits of which had been discovered in the mid-19th century. But Straits Settlements merchants had become frustrated by infighting among Chinese secret societies about such things as the control of mining land, and there was general frustration about Malay government, the problems of feuding Malay states, and the negative impact all this was having on trade.

The Chinese and Malays increasingly became entrenched in an inadequately integrated sociopolitical structure that continually generated friction between the two communities.²⁶⁴

This situation led British and Chinese traders to request political intervention from the British. This resulted in a treaty of 20 January, 1874, between the British, represented by Governor Andrew Clarke, and the ruler of Perak and other Malay chiefs. The Pangkor Treaty, as it became known (because negotiations were held on the island of Pangkor), eventually led to the sultan in each state having a British Resident to serve as chief advisor. By the early 20th century, Britain had “achieved formal or informal colonial control over nine sultanates... The various states kept their separate identities but were increasingly integrated to form British Malaya.”²⁶⁵

Such political arrangements opened up greater channels of influence for Britain among the Malay states. Whatever its political form (and this varied across the peninsula, and

^{264.} *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Malaysia,” <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-214463> (accessed 16 January, 2009).

^{265.} *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. “Malaysia”.

particularly in relation to east-coast sultanates), British rule brought profound change and transformation to the peoples and societies of the Malay peninsula. But the Pangkor Treaty did state one major area in which British influence was not permitted. The Treaty stated that the Resident's advice "must be asked and acted upon on all questions other than those touching Malay religion and custom."²⁶⁶ "Thus", says McAmis, "the British government would not permit Christian missionary work among the Muslim population of Malaya..."²⁶⁷

Migrant Workers and the Ethnic Division of Labour

There is evidence that some sense of collective Malay identity had emerged prior to the arrival of the British. We have already mentioned the important role Malacca served in the process of identity formation. But still, even by the late nineteenth century different groups of Malays of the Malay peninsula were suspicious of each other. Graham Brown has noted some examples of such hostility:

In 1890, for instance, the Perak Annual Report noted that the Malays in the state had 'an exceeding dislike for and jealousy of all foreigners (including Malays not of Perak)'... Similarly, Malay sayings common across the peninsula at the time apparently demonstrated regional antipathies, describing 'the men of Terengganu' as liars, those of Kelantan as 'thieves' and those of Pahang as 'arrogant'...²⁶⁸

Suspicion among groups of various kinds together with the presence of foreigners was to grow under colonial rule. With the British came the trappings of modernity. Increased trade and economic development demanded a larger labour force, and so the numbers of those "foreigners" began to grow. It was under British rule that immigration to Malaya was encouraged and so a more compartmentalised society began to take shape.

²⁶⁶ Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 158.

²⁶⁷ McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 38.

²⁶⁸ Brown, "Political Identities", 8, citing J. M. Gullick, *Malay Society in the Late Nineteenth Century* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989), 3, and Hugh Clifford, *In Court and Kampong: Being tales and sketches of native life in the Malay Peninsula* (London: 1897), 17.

The largest of the immigrant groups were the Chinese. It is estimated that several million Chinese arrived in Malaya between 1800 and 1941.²⁶⁹ In the late nineteenth century and beginning of the twentieth, political and economic conditions in China were tough and unstable. The growing tin and rubber industries in Malaya looked attractive, as did the prospect of living under the more stable political conditions of British rule.

The Indians had had a longer attachment to Malaya because of their trading networks, and Indian Muslims had occupied significant positions in Malacca during the entrepôt's heyday. But it was during the early part of the 19th century that numbers of Indian immigrants began to increase noticeably. Under British colonial rule, Indian troops were used for the security of the Strait Settlements, others were employed in the public works and Lee points out that for a time, "the Straits Settlements was used as a dumping ground for Indian convicts."²⁷⁰ The latter part of the 19th century saw the numbers of Indians being brought from India to work on sugar, coffee and rubber estates rise significantly. T. N. Harper gives us some idea of the numbers of both Chinese and Indians arriving in Malaya at this time together with the methods used to bring in such workers:

To offset the rising numbers of Chinese in the Malay States, and to aid the establishment of the European plantation industry, British administrators turned after 1883 to what were seen as the poverty-stricken, docile peasantry of South India. Indenture was 'a new system of slavery'. During the rubber boom of 1899, 5,249 indentured migrants came to Malaya from Madras; 9,174 in 1900. However, after this date, Indians came increasingly on their own, recruited by labour agents: 15,176 in 1899 and 30,752 in 1900. After 1908 this new flow was regulated by government and industry through a Tamil Immigration Fund; after 1909 all Indians travelled freely, although indenture contracts ran on until 1913. The increase in the Chinese population was unabated: between 1911 and 1921 it was 258,000; between

²⁶⁹ *Encyclopaedia Britannica Online*, s.v. "Malaysia," <http://search.eb.com/eb/article-214463> (accessed 16 January, 2009). According to Lee Kam Hing the first groups of Chinese who came to Malaya did not stay permanently. But this changed when the Imperial Chinese government relaxed a ban on the immigration of Chinese females towards the end of the 19th century. An increase in the numbers of Chinese women "contributed to a more settled Chinese population." "Communities to Nation", 25.

²⁷⁰ Lee, "Communities to Nation", 26.

1921 and 1931, 534,615. Another counterweight to this was settlement from the Dutch East Indies. The 'Malaysian' population rose between the 1891 and 1921 censi from 232,172 to 511,000.²⁷¹

The arrival of such large numbers of migrant workers altered the population and social shape of Malaya, making it a plural society in which occupation was strongly connected to ethnicity.²⁷² Across Southeast Asia colonial powers were content to allow the compartmentalising of society and to actively promote the 'ethnic division of labour', which as Brown points out "is arguably the most important legacy of colonial rule in Indonesia and Malaysia, and Southeast Asia more generally."²⁷³ The key advantage to having an ethnically divided labour force was that it made governing a diverse society somewhat easier, and by emphasising existing racial stereotypes and pitting one ethnic group against another, no one group could dominate, leaving the colonial powers in supreme control.

With most Malays in villages, Chinese in towns, and Indians on plantations, the various ethnic groups basically lived in their own neighbourhoods, followed different occupations, practiced their own religions, spoke their own languages, operated their own schools, and, later, formed their own political organizations.²⁷⁴

²⁷¹. T. N. Harper, *The End of Empire and the Making of Malaya* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 24.

²⁷². Philip Loh Fook Seng tells us that "The term 'plural society' appeared initially in Furnivall's well-known work, *Colonial Policy and Practice* (Cambridge, 1948) in which he defined it as 'a unit of disparate parts which owes its existence to external factors, and lacks a common social will'." Philip Loh Fook Seng, *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malay 1874-1940* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press, 1975), 1.

²⁷³. Graham Brown notes that "debate still rages over how far the colonial states were instrumental in 'creating, reinforcing, or perpetuating' this division..." (2005), 9. However, to see a more active role in this by the colonial powers seems correct given the clear evidence that exists of racial stereotyping by those same colonial powers. Graham Brown, "Political Identities", 9, cites Ian Brown, *Economic Change in South-East Asia, c. 1830-1980* (Kuala Lumpur: Oxford University Press). Correlations between ethnic origin and occupation extended even to the sub-categories of clan or caste: "In Malaysia, the word *ceti* (moneylender) derives from the name of the Indian Chettier caste, which was predominant in that sector." Brown, "Political Identities", 9.

²⁷⁴. Craig A. Lockard, "Malaysia" www.all-art.org/Visual%20History/01malaysia1.html (accessed 8 February, 2010).

The Malay peninsula was a plural society and a much divided one in which the three main ethnic groups were virtually isolated from each other so that interaction hardly existed.²⁷⁵ The Malays were largely concentrated in rural areas working in agriculture and fishing. The Chinese lived in urban environments, working in various businesses but with significant numbers in semi-rural contexts employed in mining. Most of the Indians worked on rubber plantations, on the railways and in government service. Labour recruitment and employment policies were not the only contributors to an increasingly compartmentalised society, the introduction of education also played a role. In *Seeds of Separatism: Educational Policy in Malaya 1874-1940*, Loh argues that if the British government had sought to develop “a homogeneous school system (e.g. a single-language school for all the ethnic groups)” such a policy “would have eradicated the division of labour along ethnic lines.”²⁷⁶ What eventually emerged was four school systems - one for the Malay, another for the Chinese, a third for the Indians, and the fourth was an English medium education system. The latter “tended to remain elitist in its orientations, and its direct influence on the masses was relatively insignificant.”²⁷⁷ The complexities of the education system can be illustrated, for example, from the Chinese community’s experience. Two language systems evolved - one using the Chinese language, one using English. This meant that “two groups grew up holding different world views and were in many ways as far apart as if they belonged to different ethnic communities.”²⁷⁸ And political considerations can be illustrated from the policy implemented for the education of the Malays. That system’s aim “was the transmission of Malay culture and the maintenance of Malay social cohesion. Malay education performed a homogenising and

²⁷⁵. Lee Kam Hing, "Communities to Nation", 26.

²⁷⁶. Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, 2.

²⁷⁷. Ibid, 65.

²⁷⁸. Lee, "Communities to Nation", 27.

conservative function.” It also provided an education that not only served “to minimise aspirations that were likely to emerge with a fuller development of educational opportunity” but “tended to isolate the majority of the Malay community from the mainstream of social and economic change that was taking place in their midst”, namely “the industrial and urban developments associated with the emergence of British Malaya...”²⁷⁹ The colonial power had economic and political reasons for encouraging “a contented Malay peasantry.”²⁸⁰ Educational policy itself therefore sowed “seeds of separatism” which grew alongside the labour policies of the colonial power to accentuate ethnic divisions.

The Seeds of Nationalism Take Root

The first half of the twentieth century saw the rise of nationalism in Malaya. This was not, to begin with, a common nationalism that united the various ethnic groups. Each group was concerned about the needs of its own community and influenced to a greater or lesser extent by events happening in other parts of the world - the Chinese with what was happening in China, the Indians with events in India, and the Malays were influenced by political developments in neighbouring Indonesia and the formation there of the political party, Sarekat Islam (or Islamic Union). Three streams emerged in Malay nationalism and Lee (1986) and Roff (1994) have identified these as: Islamic reformists, Malay educated radicals, and English-educated Malay aristocracy. Each of these strands expressed concern about the perceived “threat from the non-Malay community to their special position as the

²⁷⁹. Loh, *Seeds of Separatism*, 30.

²⁸⁰. Lee, “Communities to Nation”, 26. Lee points to the following examples as to why the British were reluctant to interfere with the Malay way of life: “The advantage of immigrant labour was that in bad economic times they could be repatriated and with that remove the danger of political discontent. But such an action could not be easily done with indigenous workers. There was also the fear that the large British plantations might have to compete with the Malay smallholders whose costs of production were lower.” “Communities to Nation”, 26

indigenous people and with whom the British entered into treaty obligations.”²⁸¹ Unlike the Chinese and the Indians, the Malay community were several steps ahead in their thinking about the shape of their political future.

The Second World War Intensifies Inter-Ethnic Tensions

The War years were to have decisive effects on Malaya’s political future. Japanese occupation altered the shape of Malaya and had a long-term, detrimental effect on relations between Malays and Chinese. The inter-ethnic tensions that were simmering before the War were intensified during the occupation and came to violent expression in the post-War years. Critical to this was the way centuries-long animosity between Japan and China played itself out in how Japanese occupation forces treated Chinese communities in Southeast Asia. According to Brown, “The Chinese population in... Malaya, Singapore, Sarawak and British North Borneo (Sabah) - experienced some of the harshest treatment by the Japanese occupiers.”²⁸² The Malayan Communist Party (MCP) became increasingly popular among the Chinese, and the sharp end of Chinese resistance took the form of the MCP’s military wing, the Malayan People’s Anti-Japanese Army (MPAJ). In contrast to their treatment of the Chinese, the Japanese adopted a pro-Malay stance, thereby causing much resentment among Chinese towards the Malays.

By the end of the occupation, serious ethnic conflicts had broken out, most notably in the southern state of Johor, which borders Singapore, where Malays attacks on Chinese in May 1945 - allegedly instigated by the Japanese - left thousands dead and displaced many thousands more.²⁸³

²⁸¹. See Lee, "Communities to Nation", 27-28.

²⁸². Brown, "Political Identities", 12.

²⁸³. Cheah Boon Kheng, cited in Brown, "Political Identities", 13.

As Harper says, "The interregnum belonged to the forces of chaos." The MCP organised a very basic local government structure across much of Peninsular Malaya. "However", notes Harper,

it rode the crest of a vast wave of disorder and precipitated a communal crisis of unprecedented dimensions. MPAJA kangaroo courts dispensed brutal revolutionary justice, as it took revenge on those - often Malay policemen and minor officials - who had been seen to 'collaborate' with the Japanese. The Malays armed themselves to defend their homes from a Chinese attempt to seize the country. The killings and counter-killings claimed thousands of lives. They were both a local tragedy and part of a wider experience of mass trauma and communal vendetta which followed the collapse of the Japanese empire in Southeast Asia...

In the interregnum, all the changes of the war years became visible, many of them perhaps intangible to the formal historical record. Unholy alliances were forged; witch-hunts launched; vendettas prosecuted against suspected collaborators. This catalysed long chain reactions of resentment and suspicion.²⁸⁴

Two important factors from this period can be briefly highlighted because of their subsequent role in helping to form a sense of self-identity in the years leading up to independence. Firstly we note that for the Malays "Islam became a rallying point"²⁸⁵ particularly during the resistance to the MPAJA. For instance, in certain places Islamic holy men from Sufi orders "expounded doctrines of *Sabilillah*" - the 'Path of Allah' movement, which emphasised the use of supernatural powers. And in the aftermath of the War, leadership struggles took place within the rural Malay communities - "in which the main contenders courted the support of preachers and healers of invulnerability cults..."²⁸⁶ Secondly, even though they had suffered extensively under the Japanese occupation, the War years seem to have contributed to a greater sense of community and belonging among the Chinese - not to China but to Malaya itself. As Brown puts it, "Japanese occupation in Malaya in fact solidified their self-identification as 'Malayans' rather than 'Overseas

²⁸⁴. Harper, *End of Empire*, 51, 53.

²⁸⁵. Lee, "Communities to Nation", 28.

²⁸⁶. Harper, *End of Empire*, 53.

Chinese'.²⁸⁷ These two diverse ethnic groups, Malay and Chinese, each laid claim to Malaya and looked towards building a political future in the post-war years.

Independence and the Pursuit of Unity in Diversity

In the post-war years political developments further polarised ethnic divisions. In 1945, the British proposed the formation of the Malayan Union - a uniting of all the Malayan territories except Singapore, and granting equal rights to non-Malays. The Malays saw such a union as an erosion of their identity and a threat to the status of Islam.

Demonstrations, strikes and protests were mounted by the Malays. Under the leadership of Dato' Onn bin Jaafar, the United Malays National Organisation (UMNO), which would become the dominant political party from independence onwards, was created in 1946.

Meanwhile, the Malayan Communist Party returned to the jungles in 1948 to fight a guerilla war to win political power from the British. The next twelve years were known as the Malayan Emergency, a time of unrest and violence during which the British established New Villages into which many rural Chinese were forcibly placed in order to isolate them from the guerillas. Commenting on this time of Malaysia's history, a time of "increased politicisation" when "ethnic identification became manifestly stronger", Lee Kam Hing describes the sense of urgency felt among community leaders and the British government "to pull the various races away from the diverging direction they were moving towards." But diverge they did, and early initiatives to encourage the various groups to work towards multi-racial politics failed.²⁸⁸

^{287.} Brown, "Political Identities", 13, who draws on the analysis of Lim Pui Huen, "War and ambivalence: Monuments and memorials in Johor", in Lim Pui Huen and Diana Wong (eds) *War and Memory in Malaysia and Singapore* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2000).

^{288.} Lee, "Political Identities", 29.

The Forming of the Federation of Malaysia

With the rejection of the Malayan Union, the British eventually began negotiations with the most powerful Malay political group, UMNO. These were eventually extended to include the Malayan Chinese Association (MCA), created in 1949 and the Malayan Indian Congress (MIC) formed earlier in 1946. These three ethnic-based parties formed a coalition which became known as the Alliance, and it was these leaders with Tunku Abdul Rahman as Prime Minister, who successfully saw the Federation of Malaya achieve independence on 31 August, 1957. Six years later, in 1963, British North Borneo (Sabah) together with Sarawak, joined to form the Federation of Malaysia. Singapore was originally included in the Federation but friction between Singapore's leader, Lee Kuan Yew and the Malay leaders of the Federation led to the secession of Singapore in 1965.²⁸⁹ Although there were unique and particular issues surrounding Singapore's abrupt departure from the Federation it "was arguably not an aberration in an otherwise successful consociation formula, but a symptom of the resurgence of ethnically-oriented horizontal identities through the 1960s."²⁹⁰ The negotiations leading to independence did not rest solely between the Alliance and the British authorities, but depended also on agreement and compromise between those various "ethnically-oriented horizontal identities" within the Alliance itself, crucially between the Malay and non-Malay components. The 'Independence Bargain' resulted in the Chinese receiving limited citizenship rights and maintaining their place in the local economy in return for the Malay community being guaranteed its special rights and privileges in relation to Islam and Malay customs and culture. Hence the slogan used to report the 'Bargain': "Politics for the Malays, economy

²⁸⁹. According to Lee Kuan Yew, Singapore was expelled from the Federation. There were administrative differences about tax revenues and graver difficulties about the nature of Malaysia and the question of national identity. See Lee Kuan Yew *From Third World to First: The Singapore Story, 1965-2000* (New York: Harper Collins, 2000).

²⁹⁰. Brown, "Political Identities", 22.

for the Chinese”²⁹¹ And the arrangement illustrates the tension that has continued to characterise Malaysia’s post-independence history: the relationship between the pursuit of Malaysian nation-building and the simultaneous drive to maintain Malay nationalism; the quest for national unity whilst ensuring the continuance of *ketuanan Melayu* (Malay supremacy).

The political arrangements that had been agreed by the Alliance to promote inter-racial co-operation were not accepted by all. The consociational model faced political challenges early on from parties with more of a communal appeal. And although the leaders of the Alliance itself had a lot in common - “largely middle-class, English educated, politically conservative”²⁹² - there was a fragility about their political unity and cracks began to appear as early as 1959. That year the leader of the MCA, Dr. Lim Chong Eu, stepped down because he felt the MCA was “unprepared to push for the legitimate interests of the community.”²⁹³ Ten years later “it was already evident that the MCA and the MIC were losing credibility as representatives of the Chinese and Indian communities.”²⁹⁴ This brings us to one of the darkest days in Malaysia’s history: 13 May, 1969.

Inter-racial Conflict

Writing in 1970, Felix Gagliano observed that “Malaysia has a relatively continuous heritage of racial conflict.”²⁹⁵ We have seen how inter-ethnic strife deepened and grew

²⁹¹. Brown, “Political Identities”, 20.

²⁹². Lee, “Communities to Nation”, 30.

²⁹³. Ibid, 31.

²⁹⁴. Andaya and Andaya, *History of Malaysia*, 325.

²⁹⁵. Felix V. Gagliano, *Communal Violence in Malaysia 1969: The Political Aftermath* (Ohio: Ohio University, 1970), 7.

during the years of Japanese occupation, and how that violence erupted, leaving deep scars of hatred and distrust. Then, against a background of resurgent Islam, racial tensions were high in Singapore in 1950 when the High Court annulled the Islamic marriage between a Malay man and a Dutch girl. Maria Hertogh had been adopted by Malays and was reclaimed in late 1950 by her Dutch parents who refused to acknowledge her Islamic marriage. The court's decision in favour of the parents was perceived by the Malay community as an insult to Islam and protests led to rioting which targeted Europeans and Chinese. Sixteen people were killed as a result of the infamous Maria Hertogh riots.

The episode was a profound shock to the British government. In particular, it was disturbed by the depth of animosity shown towards Europeans by groups whom it had taken to be its strongest collaborators. Although moderate leaders... were restrained in their response to the affair, there were alarming undercurrents of anger. It illustrated the ways in which Islam could be mobilised to articulate general anti-colonial sentiments.²⁹⁶

Using the data gathered by Gagliano, Goh Keat Peng documents the violence of the 1950s and 60s:

There were frequent clashes between Malay authorities and non-Malay students, trade unionists and secret society members in the 1950s and early 1960s. In July 1964, two persons were killed in incidents at Bukit Mertajam. In September 1964, Singapore Malays were urged by some politicians to unite against Lee Kuan Yew. Racial tensions rose and rioting occurred when a Malay procession was held commemorating the Prophet's birthday. During this Singapore version of the May 13 riots, 22 persons were killed, 450 injured and 500 people were jailed. In 1965, hundreds of left-wing and mainly Chinese supporters of the Socialist Front took to the streets in Kuala Lumpur protesting against political arrests under the Internal Security Act and other government policies. It took the imposition of a city-wide curfew and mass-arrests to bring the situation under control. Prior to the May 13 incidents, Malay-Chinese clashes occurred in Penang and Butterworth on November 25, 1967. This followed an unsuccessful general strike called by the Labour Party to protest the devaluation of the [Malaysian] dollar. The Penang hartas which also affected Kuala Lumpur and Johore took 11 lives, with 200 people injured and 400 jailed.²⁹⁷

²⁹⁶. Harper, *End of Empire*, 337.

²⁹⁷. Goh Keat Peng, "The Christian and Race Relations in Malaysia" in *The Christian and Race Relations in Malaysia* ed. Michael Moey, Kwan Yoke Lin, Goh Keat Peng (Petaling Jaya: Graduates Christian Fellowship, 1986), 3.

The rioting of 13 May, 1969, took place three days after federal elections were held on 10 May, 1969. If the riots were not, as Goh says, “an isolated event”, what were the specific factors that collided to make it such a dark day? For one, the paradoxical relationship between Malaysian nationalism and Malay supremacy reached boiling point by the time the federal elections arrived. A disillusioned electorate was more than ready to vent its frustrations, with each ethnic group prepared to use the election to express how much they felt their own respective communities were losing out. In the run up to the election and in the context of vigorous campaigning by Chinese opposition parties, the funeral was held in Kuala Lumpur of a young Chinese man killed by the police.²⁹⁸ The funeral procession attracted huge crowds of around 10,000 people, and racial tensions were running high.²⁹⁹ Days later, the results of the election showed the Alliance to have lost their two-thirds majority in the federal parliament. As the extent of the losses became clear, the results “ignited smouldering ethnic tensions.”³⁰⁰ The main beneficiaries were Chinese opposition parties, Gerakan and the Democratic Action Party, who organised a major victory parade in Kuala Lumpur on 12 May, with counter demonstrations organised by UMNO on 13 May. The situation quickly descended into “unprecedented and uncontrolled ethnic violence”,³⁰¹ with serious rioting and looting lasting for four days and sporadic incidents of communal violence continuing for a further two months. Official figures state that 196 people died and 409 were injured, the majority being Chinese. Approximately 6000

^{298.} According to Leon Comber, this young man was a member of the Labour Party of Malaysia and was shot dead by the police for resisting arrest. Comber says that at this funeral, only a day before the elections, “serious communal violence was only narrowly averted by the good sense and patience of the police.” Leon Comber, *13 May 1969: A Historical Survey of Sino-Malay Relations* (Singapore: Graham Brash, 1983), 66.

^{299.} Andaya and Andaya, *History of Malaysia*, 297.

^{300.} *Ibid*, 297.

^{301.} *Ibid*, 298.

residents of Kuala Lumpur lost homes and property, and 5561 arrests were made.³⁰² A state of emergency was declared and parliament replaced by a National Operations Council. By the time parliament was restored, after a gap of eighteen months, the Alliance had rebuilt itself and returned to its former parliamentary dominance having induced many of the opposition parties to join the coalition.³⁰³

Initiatives to Strengthen Unity

The ostensible reasons given for the inter-ethnic violence concentrated on the federal election results and the legacy of colonial policies such as the 'ethnic division of labour'. Under the leadership of the new Prime Minister, Abdul Razak, the government announced the New Economic Policy (NEP) which was to achieve two main goals: the ending of poverty and the eradication of the link between ethnic identity and economic function. The NEP was designed to increase the economic well-being of the *bumiputra*, particularly the Malays, and the chief instrument for achieving this was the use of affirmative action policies for the *bumiputra* in education and employment. However, the policies adopted by the Alliance in the aftermath of 13 May set Malaysia on a trajectory that would take the country further away from democracy.

In reality... [the NEP] heralded a new era of state interventionism and Malay chauvinism; in the words of Alasdair Bowie... it represented 'a form of Third World economic nationalism [in which] the principal antagonist was not foreign but rather domestic [i.e. the Chinese].'³⁰⁴

From this point onwards, there was to be no public debate about the position of the Malay language, the Malay rulers, Islam, or the appropriateness of the central place given to

³⁰². See Andaya and Andaya, *History of Malaysia*, 298 and s.v. "The 13 May 1969 tragedy" *Encyclopaedia of Malaysia* Vol. 11 (Singapore: Didier Millet, 2006).

³⁰³. The Alliance changed its name to the Barisan National (National Front) in 1970.

³⁰⁴. Brown, "Political Identities", 23.

Malay culture and customs. These were deemed 'sensitive issues' and enshrined in the amended constitution to protect them from public debate or criticism.

Very soon after the events of 13 May 1969, the government began to address the questions of nation building and national identity. In July of the same year the government launched the Department of National Unity and on 31 August 1970, Independence Day, a 'National Ideology' was proclaimed. The Rukunegara (Articles of Faith of the State) was to articulate a uniting set of values and priorities that would sustain a united and enduring Malaysia with its new social and economic programmes:

Our nation, Malaysia, being dedicated to achieving a greater unity of all her peoples; to maintaining a democratic way of life; to creating a just society in which the wealth of the nation shall be equitably shared; to ensuring a liberal approach to her rich and diverse cultural traditions; to building a progressive society which shall be orientated to modern science and technology.

We, her people, pledge our united efforts to attain those ends guided by these principles:

Belief in God
Loyalty to King and Country
Sanctity of the Constitution
Rule of Law
Good Behaviour and Morality

The challenge of creating a greater sense of national unity and identity was taken up energetically by Malaysia's fourth Prime Minister, the charismatic Mahathir bin Mohamad who came to power in 1981. A controversial figure and the first non-aristocrat to hold Malaysia's highest office, the country "gained a new lease of life under the Mahathir administration".³⁰⁵ His 22 year premiership was noted for its authoritarian style and economic success. And to sustain that success, Mahathir set before the country the ambitious goal of achieving developed nation status by the year 2020. This goal was

³⁰⁵ Harper, *End of Empire*, 380.

encapsulated in what he called Vision 2020, an important part of which was the use of the term *bangsa Malaysia* as a way of expressing the desire for an inclusive future for all the ethnic groups of Malaysia. This startled political onlookers, especially from the non-Malay community, given that the word *bangsa* had traditionally been used by Malay leaders in connection with Malay nationalism. Mahathir now expanded the term, using it to embrace a more inclusive nationalism. The idea of *bangsa Malaysia* has been widely used since it was introduced by Mahathir, but whether it has been successfully implemented is part of an ongoing debate.³⁰⁶

Issues Facing Malaysia Today

There has been no substantial change to the policies of the leadership and administrations that have followed since Dr. Mahathir Mohamad stepped down as Prime Minister in 2003. There is no need, therefore, to discuss the administration of Abdullah Badawi, suffice to say that having replaced Mahathir in 2003, Badawi consolidated his leadership by winning a landslide victory in the General Elections of 2004. The re-emergence of Anwar Ibrahim unto the political stage in that same year has since proved decisive. Badawi's term of office started well, with approval ratings at 91 percent in November 2004.³⁰⁷ But Badawi's inability to tackle inflation, to address ethnic and inequality issues, combined with his failure to deliver on promises to deal with corruption and improve government service meant that by December 2007 his approval rating had dropped to 61 percent. Still, most political analysts believed the Barisan National would retain its two-thirds majority of parliamentary seats following the March 2008 General Election. But this was not to be the

^{306.} In 2004, the editorial of the *New Straits Times* asked "Just what is preventing us from opening ourselves to each other? Why do many of us fear that we will be "less of ourselves" if we mix more with "the others"? The issue of racial polarisation has been debated to death but it looks like a solution is not yet in sight..." *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 2004.

^{307.} Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research, "Selangor Darul Ehsan Voter Opinion Poll 18-24 November, 2007." www.merdeka.org (accessed 21 October, 2009).

case. In what was described as a political tsunami on 8th March, 2008, the Barisan National coalition suffered significant defeats, and for the first time since the 1969 election lost the two-thirds majority needed to pass amendments to the constitution. Badawi survived a further year in office before bowing to pressure from within his own party to step aside. Former Deputy Prime Minister, Najib Tun Razak, succeeded Abdullah Badawi as Prime Minister on 3rd April, 2009. Meanwhile, at the time of writing, Anwar Ibrahim leads the government opposition.

The themes covered in the preceding historical survey can be distilled into three areas that continue to dominate Malaysia today: the role of Islam, particularly in relation to the non-Muslim community in Malaysia; the attempt to promote and consolidate a sense of national identity; the multi-ethnic nature of Malaysian society and the importance of cultivating good inter-ethnic relations.

Islamisation

While seeking to drive Malaysia forward towards a modern, highly developed, egalitarian nation, using Vision 2020, Dr. Mahathir was at the same time continuing the steady process of Islamisation he had begun during his early days in office. Ghazzali Basri tell us that

The Malaysian Government under the premiership of Dr. Mahathir Mohamed took a positive attitude in promoting Islamic da'wah in the country. The move had brought about the implementation of the Policy of inculcating Islamic values in the Administration. It was declared as part of the Islamisation process.³⁰⁸

Another critical factor was at work in this. The majority party in Mahathir's governing coalition - UMNO (United Malays National Organisation), was having to demonstrate its

³⁰⁸. Ghazzali Basri, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Nurin Enterprise, 1992), 39.

Islamic credentials and commitment over and against its main rival, the Islamic opposition party PAS (Parti Islam Sa-Melayu). Basri again comments:

The fact that Islam has profoundly begun to supplant secular values was then gaining increasing support, thus this made PAS (Islamic Party) more preferable to UMNO in the eyes of most Malay electorates. The latter, not wishing to be brushed away, claims that their struggle is no less Islamic, except that it was not the sort of revolutionary Islam propagated by the former. It was against this backdrop that the Government embarked on the policy of Islamisation in the early 1983.³⁰⁹

It is against this background of an ongoing battle for Malay votes that we should understand Mahathir's controversial declaration of Malaysia as an "Islamic State" on 29 September 2001.³¹⁰

In the dual pursuit that saw development goals for the nation pursued alongside the promotion of Islam, we see the Mahathir administration attempting to demonstrate to the Malays (as well as to the wider world) that Islam and modernity are not incompatible and that a modern Malay identity requires the embracing of a modernist Islam. What we see in Mahathir is the "antagonistic relationship" characteristic of post-independence Malaysia in

^{309.} Ghazali Basri, *Christian Mission and Islamic Da'wah in Malaysia*, 39.

^{310.} The NECF Religious Liberty Commission's "Report on the State of Religious Liberty in Malaysia for the Year 2001" makes the following comment: "On 29 September, 2001, the prime Minister Dr. Mahathir Mohamed announced that Malaysia is an Islamic state on the ground that certain features found in an Islamic state were already present in Malaysia. It appears that the politis was behind this affirmation by the Prime Minister. The opposition party PAS had tried to woo the support of the Muslim community by promising to establish an Islamic state if they were to come into power. It appears that the affirmation of an Islamic state is an attempt by the Government to defuse PAS' challenge. Subsequently, all the leaders of the ruling *Barisan Nasional*'s component parties came out in an orchestrated support of this statement by the Prime Minister. A short debate ensued in the press with DAP, a non-Malay opposition party, leading the contrary view. During the debate, the Government assured the public that in spite of the announcement, the Constitution will not be tampered with and that other religions will be permitted to exist. However, these assurances do not offer sufficient guarantee that Malaysia will not degenerate into something of the Islamic model which PAS is promoting. Rhetoric may lead to reality... The unilateral affirmation of Malaysia as an Islamic state is both misleading and dangerous. It flies in the face of the obvious character of the Constitution which clearly provides for a secular and pluralistic form of government and constitutional structure. *Religious Liberty After 50 Years of Independence* eds. Samuel Ang, Lee Min Choon, Lim Siew Foong (Petaling Jaya: NECF Malaysia Research Commission, 2008), 130-131.

which Malaysian nation-building is pursued alongside exclusivist Malay nationalism; the goal of *bangsa Malaysia* being pursued paradoxically and in tandem with the process of Islamisation.³¹¹ Assessing how far Malaysia has come, Graham Brown, writing in 2005, asserts that “the promotion of a national identity... has increasingly moved away from the Malay chauvinism of the National Cultural Policy to a more inclusive nationalism.”³¹² But this may be too generous. Malay chauvinism persists with the assertion by Malay parties that Malay rights and privileges must remain central and non-negotiable. Debate about how the New Economic Policy, launched in 1971 and its successor, the New Development Policy of 1991, might be reconfigured to benefit the *non-bumiputra* community is seen as a sensitive issue, being met with resistance from many Malays.³¹³ A response to Brown’s assessment might argue that a more inclusive nationalism will only be achieved when the link between ethnicity and economic and educational privileges is eradicated and a level playing field is created to enable all those needing economic and educational assistance to be provided for, irrespective of ethnicity. The question is, will this ever be possible given the inextricable bond made in Malaysia’s Constitution between Malay ethnicity and Islam, so that to be Malay is to be Muslim? This is enshrined in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of 1957:

Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom...

Hence, the central place given and guarded for Malay customs, culture, language and religion is by definition bound up with the promotion of Islam. Ng Kam Weng writes that given the unique definition enshrined in the Federal Constitution that identifies

^{311.} Brown, “Political Identities”, 20.

^{312.} Ibid, 25. The National Cultural Policy was based on the belief that Malay culture and language was appropriate for all citizens.

^{313.} The multi-racial political party Parti Keadilan Rakyat (The Peoples Justice Party), led by former Deputy Prime Minister of Malaysia Anwar Ibrahim, has vowed to abolish the NEP and to replace it with a non-ethnic approach to the eradication of poverty. See <http://www.keadilanrakyat.org>

Malays with Islam, it is not surprising that ethnic nationalism finds expression in Islamic revivalism and Islamisation.³¹⁴

We should at this point consider how Islamisation as a process has been worked out in Malaysia since Independence. To begin with, what form of Islam has been promoted in Malaysia? Ng Kam Weng draws our attention to the fact that "Islam in Malaysia has changed so significantly that one may arguably describe the change as going through various paradigms."³¹⁵ Ng has identified five paradigms which he sets out in table form:³¹⁶

Type	Person/Party	Characteristic	Period
Qualified-Secularist Islam	Tunku Abdul Rahman	General acceptance of secular framework of Islam	1960s
Modernist/ Accommodationist	Dr. Mahathir, IKIM	Infusion of Islamic values in public institutions	1970s
Reformist	ABIM	Education programmes to restructure social institutions	1980s
Legalist	Pusat Islam/JAKIM	Legal regulations extended to regulate social life	1990s
Purist Fundamentalist	Parti Islam Malaysia	Paramount of Shariah and Islamic State, prominent focus on Hudud	1990s

The decade of the sixties, immediately following Malaysia's Independence is described "as the age of innocence when adherents from various religions mingled freely without having

³¹⁴. Ng Kam Weng, "Pluralist Democracy and Spheres of Justice: The Quest for 'Complex Equality' in an Islamic Context" in Mark L. Y. Chan ed. *The Quest for Covenant Community and Pluralist Democracy in an Islamic Context* (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2008), 3.

³¹⁵. Ibid, 2.

³¹⁶. Ibid, 3. IKIM (Institut Kefahaman Islam Malaysia / Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia); ABIM (Angkatan Belia Islam Malaysia / Islamic Youth Movement of Malaysia); JAKIM (Jabatan Kemajuan Islam Malaysia / Department of Islamic Development Malaysia).

to worry about hurting the sensitivities of one another..."³¹⁷ With the 1970s, Malaysia enters a time of "ethnic nationalism when a sense of economic competition replaced a spirit of coexistence, beginning with the implementation of the New Economic Policy in 1969."³¹⁸ It was during the 1970s that "Malays responded to a world-wide resurgence of Islam and found a new certainty and solace in religion at a time of considerable social and economic change."³¹⁹ A movement for reform within Islam known as *dakwah*, became influential in Malaysia, its aim - "to energise Malay Muslims and to inject a new religiosity into all aspects of the nation's life."³²⁰ Countering calls from the Islamic party PAS in the 1980s that Malaysia should become an Islamic State, Mahathir's administration promoted the assimilation of Islamic values into all areas of public life. The strongly Islamic stance of PAS had proved popular among the Malays, especially in the more conservative and traditional east coast states of Peninsular Malaysia. It therefore became increasingly important for Mahathir's government "to accord Islam a greater visibility in Malaysian society"³²¹ and in 1984 the policy of Islamisation was officially announced as "the inculcation of Islamic values", promoted as the inculcation of the universal values of trust, respectability, honesty, dedication, moderation, diligence, discipline, co-operation, honourable behaviour and thanksgiving. However, this policy has been seen by many non-Muslims as

the platform for various quarters to drive an Islamisation policy and initiative, aiming to institutionalise Islam, its systems of government, its laws and its structures with attendant marginalisation and alienation of non-Muslims.³²²

³¹⁷. Ng Kam Weng, "Pluralist Democracy", 2-3.

³¹⁸. Ibid, 3.

³¹⁹. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 331.

³²⁰. Ibid, 331. McAmis explains that *dakwah* or *da'wa* "is comparable to mission in the church. It is a 'call' to follow Islam, and is used not only for gaining new converts, but to revive or reform the faith and life of all Muslims, especially lapsed Muslims." (2001), 80-81.

³²¹. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 332.

³²². NECF Religious Liberty Commission, "Report on the State of Religious Liberty in Malaysia for

Christian theologian and Islamicist, Martin Goldsmith, has written about the struggle felt in many Muslim countries between the government and the Ulama, and which of these really holds power and represents the people. Goldsmith provides this assessment of the situation in Malaysia:

In some other countries (for example, UAE [United Arab Emirates] or Jordan) the government allows freedom to the Islamist movement, but seeks to undermine their influence by allowing some elements of Shari'ah and thus tries to make the Islamists seem redundant. It seems to me that Malaysia fits this pattern, for the government here is clearly seeking to show itself to be the true Muslims who are introducing Shari'ah increasingly, but Islamists are never content with any partial introduction of Shari'ah, for they are looking for total Shari'ah ruling in the nation. Their beliefs allow no compromise. So the government feels itself compelled to introduce more and more of Shari'ah and we may witness increasing Islamisation in the nation.³²³

Over the past thirty years Islamisation has profoundly influenced Malaysian government policies in the fields of education, economics, and the media.³²⁴ According to Ng Kam Weng, Islamisation policies in education have led to an increase in "Islamic content in school curricula", the "slow suffocation and eventual takeover of mission schools", the rapid growth of "*madrasas* (religious seminaries) that nurture Islamic youth indoctrinated with militant Islamic ideology" and the establishing "of Islamic Universities (e.g. the International Islamic University, Kuala Lumpur) and the Islamic Study Centres located near prominent western universities like Oxford and Cambridge."³²⁵ In the area of mass media, Islamisation has seen the proliferation of Islamic news services including radio *dakwah*, the development of popular magazines and booklets that provide Islamic perspectives on a range of social issues, together with the setting up of a number of think

the Year 2007" (Petaling Jaya: NECF Religious Liberty Commission, 2008), 160.

³²³. Martin Goldsmith, "A Christian Theological and Political Response to Growing Islamisation" (lecture, Mission Leadership Forum, Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Seremban, 11-12 August, 2008).

³²⁴. See Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 332.

³²⁵. Ng Kam Weng, "Islam in South East Asia and Christian Mission," *Transformation* Vol. 20, no. 4 (2003): 223.

tanks "to shape public perceptions and sympathy for Islamic policies", for example the Institute Kefahaman Islam Malaysia (IKIM, Institute of Islamic Understanding Malaysia) and the International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation (ISTAC). On the introduction of the Islamisation policy to Malaysia's mass media, Andaya and Andaya write:

Greater emphasis was placed on Islamic-related projects, and the media were encouraged to make adjustments in coverage to reflect this new shift. There was an immediate outcry at the increase in Islamic programmes on television and radio, and other religions called for equal time. In refusing to grant this request, Mahathir defended the policy 'since Islam is the national and official religion and every citizen should learn its values'.³²⁶

Having experienced decades of steady Islamisation, non-Muslims have raised objections at what they perceive to be the erosion of their religious liberties.³²⁷ The Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) held a press conference on Tuesday, 19th June, 2007, and released a strongly worded Note of Protest entitled *Unity Threatened By Continuing Infringements of Religious Freedom* in which the Council highlights "a series of court cases and governmental actions that indicates an increasing Islamisation of law and public policy in Malaysia." The document continues:

This creeping Islamisation process has created a sense of fear amongst non Muslims comprising Buddhists, Christians, Hindus, Sikhs, Taoists and others, who form about 45% of the population of the country. Many Malaysians from all races and religions are frightened how easily the safeguards entrenched and enshrined 50 years ago in our Federal Constitution are now being eroded through the back door.³²⁸

³²⁶. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 332.

³²⁷. See Goh Keat Peng, "Church and State in Malaysia," *Transformation* Vol. 6, no. 3 (1989): 16-20.

³²⁸. MCCBCHST, *Unity Threatened By Continuing Infringements of Religious Freedom: Note of Protest by the Malaysian Consultative of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism & Taoism* (Kuala Lumpur: MCCBCHST, 2007), 1. In this document the term "non-Muslim is used to refer to persons who do not profess Islam as his or her religion." The MCCBCHST believe that "Many Muslims... also do not support this increasing trend of shifting power to theocrats but they are too scared to speak out for fear of being labelled 'deviants' or being the subject of threats." A number of memoranda have been issued from the MCCBCHST over the years, including *Respect the Right to Profess And Practice One's Religion*, dated October 2005, in which the government is called upon "to make urgent legislative reforms to alleviate these

Non-Muslims in Malaysia are concerned that such a persistent and far-reaching process of Islamisation is seriously impeding the cultivation of a genuine national unity. Some feel that the national unity programme itself is being subverted by the Islamic aim "to assimilate [non-Muslims] in the name of unity (*tawhid*) of all society under Shariah."³²⁹

Identity

When independence came, Malaysia adopted a consociational approach to government that recognised "vertical identities *within* clearly demarcated horizontal groups" unlike neighbouring Indonesia, where political authority was sought "through the coercive repression of such identities..."³³⁰ The question of identity in Malaysia has remained important. Malay identity in particular has been reconstructed at various times to reflect the emphases of whoever is in power. The British colonial rulers presented a picture of the Malays "as farmers and fishermen, essentially rural people, content with the simple pleasures of life and unfitted for competitive struggle in the modern world".³³¹ Such a picture served British economic purposes at that time. Before coming into power, Mahathir was highly critical of the British for the creation of a plural society. One of his early attempts to address the underlying reasons for Malay poverty is to be found in his book, *The Malay Dilemma*, published in 1970. The book fell foul of censorship laws introduced in the aftermath of the 1969 riots and was banned. Among several controversial

concerns, so that our nation and people can concentrate on the more pressing tasks that face us in achieving our shared national vision and aspirations." MCCBCHST, (2007), 8. The 2007 document is signed by the official representatives of all the faith groups who make up the Council.

³²⁹. Ng Kam Weng, "Pluralist Democracy", 5.

³³⁰. Brown, "Political Identities", 25.

³³¹. C. W. Watson, "Reconstructing Malay Identity," *Anthropology Today* Vol. 12, no. 5 (October, 1996): 10. On the topic of Malay identity, see also Anthony Reid, "Understanding *Melayu* (Malay) as a Source of Diverse Modern Identities" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* Vol. 32, no. 3 (2001): 295-313. Further discussion on the question of identity will be found below in chapter 4.

aspects of the book is Mahathir's acceptance of the racial stereotypes used by the British colonialists:

It is not the choice of the Malays that they should be rural and poor. It is the result of the clash of racial traits. They are easy-going and tolerant. The Chinese, especially, are hardworking and astute in business. When the two came in contact the result was inevitable.³³²

Later, when in power, Mahathir's administration attempted to project the Malays as a more dynamic entrepreneurial people, with the aim of steering them from both the idea of the mystical Malay of the Malaccan past and the sedentary peasant of the colonial era. Taking on the more positive identity of the *Melayu baru* ('new Malay') was the way to free the Malays from their 'subsidy mentality'. But as Watson points out, "fundamental to the construction of a radically different Malay ethnic identity was a radical reinterpretation of received history."³³³ For instance, in projecting the Malays as great commercial venturers it is often overlooked that Malacca's maritime success in the Srivijayan period "had been achieved through cooperation with the Chinese. It was the combination of Malay diplomacy and Chinese skills which had made the southern seas so prosperous."³³⁴ The implication of this for 21st century Malaysia needs no explanation. But this kind of historical insight is given little or no place of prominence because, as Ng points out, "The identity of this society is essentially grounded on the politics of ethnic-nationalism. In particular, Malay identity is founded on a political memory of the Malacca Sultanate in the fifteenth century."³³⁵ But for the non-Malay community (and very likely a good many Malays themselves) the question of identity, of what *bangsa Malaysia* means in today's multiethnic Malaysia, remains a relevant and urgent topic for all Malaysians, for as Cheah

³³². Mahathir Bin Mohamad, *The Malay Dilemma* (Singapore / Kuala Lumpur: Times Books International, 1970), 85.

³³³. Watson, "Reconstructing Malay Identity", 11.

³³⁴. Ibid, 12.

³³⁵. Ng Kam Weng "Pluralist Democracy", 9.

Boon Kheng reminds us, "Since its birth, Malaysia has lacked a clear-cut national identity".³³⁶ And such a lack of shared identity has made the quest for national unity and confidence in a shared future a major challenge for every governing administration since Malaysia's independence.

Inter-ethnic relations

Even with the extreme measures introduced following the events of 1969, particularly those at the heart of the New Economic Policy, it is surprising to many onlookers that inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia have remained largely peaceful for the best part of forty years. Why has this been so? Scholars provide two answers. Firstly, Harold Crouch maintains that Malaysia has moved from democracy towards "incremental authoritarianism". This has allowed the state to use authoritarian powers to maintain order, restrict civil liberties and minimise political opposition. Beginning with the racial riots of 1969, Crouch examines four political crisis in Malaysia and asserts that

Whatever the origins of each crisis, in each case authoritarian measures were taken that strengthened the position of the government or particular groups within it.³³⁷

Secondly, the NEP's ostensible goals were accepted by all the ethnic groups as necessary for addressing obvious inequalities of wealth and to maintain ethnic peace. Even though the Malay community stood to gain most out of the policy, other ethnic groups believed it to be politically necessary. Peace has been maintained, according to Brown, by a form of government best described as "authoritarian consociationalism".³³⁸

³³⁶. Cheah Boon Kheng, "Ethnicity in the Making of Malaysia," in *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 93.

³³⁷. Harold Crouch, *Government and Society in Malaysia* (New South Wales: Allen and Unwin, 1996), 96.

³³⁸. Brown, "Political Identities", 20.

Although compiled with special reference to the state of religious liberty in Malaysia, the NECF's yearly Report on the State of Religious Liberty in Malaysia has become a source of well documented research which each year includes a summary of the socio-political climate in Malaysia. For the year 2007, the Commission contained the following assessment:

The Malaysian socio-political landscape grew even grimmer in 2007 as inter-ethnic, inter-religious and, of course, political tensions, which were already high in 2006, further heightened. Despite clear and increasing evidence of cracks in the nation's social fabric, the top political leadership continued to insist that the bonds holding the different communities together were strong.

In light of the current inter-ethnic difficulties, it may help to take a wider perspective by observing patterns of inter-ethnic relations over the course of Malaysia's history. Lee Kam Hing points to the work scholars have done in analysing "the degree to which the Chinese in Southeast Asia have integrated or assimilated" into various contexts. Five patterns have been identified and Lee has taken these and adapted them from their specifically Chinese focus, and applied them to the wider field of inter-ethnic relations in Malaysia. We will now look briefly at these five patterns.³³⁹

The first pattern is where there is virtually no relationship between ethnic groups at all. Each has its own self-interest at heart and is more concerned to maintain and emphasise its own ethnic distinctiveness. In this pattern, says Lee, "ethnic differences and separateness tend to arouse negative feelings such as anxiety, resentment and envy when they are too conspicuous." This characterised the early, pre-colonial part of Malaysia's history, and was present to some degree during the colonial period. A second pattern is seen where a "process of adaptation" leads to an ethnic group retaining its distinctiveness yet being

³³⁹. Lee Kam Hing, "Communities to Nation", 31.

willing to identify with the political and cultural symbols of a larger and different group. This pattern of integration can be seen at work in Malaysia's post-war period. A third sees an immigrant community assimilating into the host society and gradually moving away from a strong expression of their original, ethnic identity. Some would hold that this is the most desirable pattern to see emerge in a multi-ethnic society. To some degree, "although less frequently or extensively", this third pattern has been present in Malaysia's history. Lee believes that colonial rule hindered the move towards such a pattern "and by its policies strengthened pattern [one]." A fourth pattern is "where class interests predominate and cut across ethnic boundaries." But according to Lee this has not been prevalent in Malaysia. "Past efforts to mobilise political activities along class lines have failed. There are those who believed that with economic development, class interests would become more important." But this has not been the case. Finally, pattern five is where integration or assimilation occurs "through a foreign or new culture." This pattern is strongly connected to colonialism, and as nationalism gathered momentum, it became "increasingly irrelevant."³⁴⁰

Challenges Facing the Malaysian Church in its Socio-Historical Context

The extent of the process of Islamisation, the question of identity formation, and the way in which diverse ethnic groups relate to one another within a common society, are all contemporary challenges for all Malaysians. But our focus in this thesis falls upon the Christian churches and the socio-historical context we have set out in this chapter helps us locate and make sense of the challenges they face in 21st century Malaysia. Three challenges emerge from the socio-historical picture set out in this chapter; some of these

³⁴⁰. Lee Kam Hing, "Communities to Nation", 31-32.

challenges have proved to be obstacles for the church in its reconciling mission, others provide the churches with opportunities to be peacebuilders in a divided land.

Christian Churches are Associated with the Colonial past

Firstly, the colonial past is so closely associated with the coming of Christianity to Southeast Asia that churches are seen by many "as an alien institution". Pattern five above, therefore, has serious implications for the Christian churches in Malaysia. Lee himself asks: "If such observation is prevalent, are Christians able to move the Church out of this pattern?"³⁴¹ Agreeing that this viewpoint is widespread, Hwa Yung has warned of the serious consequences if churches continue to "cling on to patterns of Western or other non-indigenous forms of Christianity."³⁴²

Christian churches Feel Threatened by the Steady Process of Islamisation

Secondly, this chapter has discussed the extent of the process of Islamisation. This has resulted in restricted liberties and a growing fear among non-Muslims that they are in danger of being reduced to a tolerated minority. Many Christians share the view articulated by the Malaysian theologian Ng Kam Weng who holds that "Islam has historically employed a strategy of conquest, isolation, and assimilation of the *dhimmi* ('protected' non-Muslim minorities) to consolidate and extend its authority."³⁴³ The extent of the denial of religious liberties is comprehensive and has been represented by Göran Wiking in the following table:³⁴⁴

³⁴¹. Lee Kam Hing, "Communities to Nation", 32.

³⁴². Hwa Yung, "Religious Freedom and Muslim States," *Transformation* Vol. 8, no. 2 (1991): 16.

³⁴³. Ng Kam Weng, "Pluralist Democracy", 6.

³⁴⁴. Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Issues to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches* Studia Missionalia Svecana XCVI (Lund: Swedish Institute of Missionary Research, 2004), 77-78.

Activity	Government imposition
Share the gospel	Not with Muslims
Meet as a group	Obtain permit for groups over 3 or 5 persons
Registering as denomination	Registrar of Societies monitors activities
Preach the gospel	If considered seditious, ISA imprisonment without trial may follow
Rent Premises	Must be gazetted for religious use, i.e. not possible
Buy land	OK
Convert land to "religious use"	Permit on arbitrary basis, often refused
Obtain building permit	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Not if there is a majority Muslim presence in the neighbourhood 2. Any protest from the surrounding community - which must be informed - may cancel the process 3. Church must not be taller than the nearest Mosque, including difference in ground elevation 4. Permit granted may be rescinded by Government discretion
Conduct kindergarten	Permit needed, name decided by authorities
Conduct school	Permit needed, enrolment only permitted for Christians
Use teaching material	Import or printing of books, films etc. subject to censorship scrutiny
Invite guest speaker from e.g. India	Permit needed
Recruit church workers from abroad	Visa / work permit not issued
Raise funds abroad for church activities	Transfer of more than RM10,000 to any NGO including churches disallowed
Conduct activities in Bahasa Malaysia national language	List of proscribed religious terms must be respected, BM Bible may only be used in the church building, Indonesian Bible translation banned
Convert people to Christianity by baptism	Act of conversion not recognised for Muslims who remain under Shariah jurisdiction even after conversion
Solemnise marriage of members or others	Pastors no longer allowed to do this

Bury the dead	Cremation may be a forced option due to acute shortage of Christian burial ground
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As Wiking correctly points out in his thesis, despite these repressive measures, churches in Malaysia continue to grow and congregations are being planted in various locations nationwide.³⁴⁵ Church growth occurs because on the one hand, Christian communities usually refuse to comply with many of these laws, and on the other hand, government authorities are highly selective in enforcement, some issues being considered more important than others.³⁴⁶ Wiking himself tends to agree with those who do not see Islamisation as "the single largest threat to the very survival of pluralist democracy and the multi-religious

³⁴⁵. This should not be understood by the reader to necessarily involve the actual physical construction of a church building. In fact, it would be highly unusual if it did. Newly established churches typically rent shop-lot or office space accommodation in which to hold their services of worship and community activities.

³⁴⁶. In recent years the two most controversial areas have been conversions to and from Islam, and the use of the word 'Allah' for God by Malaysian Christians whose mother tongue is Malay. On the latter, see the exchange between Saad Hashim and Ng Kam Weng, "Saad Hashim is either misguided or mischievous on the 'Allah' issue," www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1064 (accessed 3 March 2009). Against the backdrop of legal proceedings surrounding the use of the word "Allah" by the Roman Catholic Church in its publication *The Herald*, the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST) issued a press statement saying that "any attempt to proscribe the use of the term 'ALLAH' in any way to any religion as untenable from the standpoint of language, theology or history." "Attempt to Proscribe the Use of the Term 'Allah' is Untenable," press release, Thursday, 5 March, 2009. On 31 December, 2009, the High Court ruled in favour of the Catholic Herald's continued use of the term "Allah" in its publications. The issue extends wider than the Catholic Church's print publications. In its Press Statement, NECF Malaysia "noted that in both East and West Malaysia, there are many churches conducting their religious services in Bahasa Malaysia as well as in their own mother tongue. The use of the word "Allah" is in consonant with this their traditional usage all the while and should be continued in the interest of preserving national unity and harmony." Following the High Court judgement, Malay Muslims were reported to have thrown fire bombs into several churches in the early hours of 8th January, 2010. The Churches Federation of Malaysia issued the following Press Statement: "The Christian Federation of Malaysia strongly and unreservedly condemns the violent attacks and attempted ones of fire-bombing several churches in Kuala Lumpur and Petaling Jaya in the early hours of this morning (8 January 2010). We are against such actions that seek to intimidate people and also to rend the fabric of peace and goodwill in our country." The statement continued by saying "Christians are a peace-loving people and so we will remain calm and rely on our police officers to investigate and to arrest the criminals involved and to protect all Malaysians against violence and criminal intimidation." www.necf.org.my/newsmaster.cfm?&menuid=43&action=view&retrieveid=1154 (accessed 16 January, 2010). At the time of writing, the situation remains politically sensitive, though no further attacks on churches have been reported.

character of modern Malaysia".³⁴⁷ He leans instead towards the view that "pluralism and tolerance are more deeply embedded in S E Asian culture than Islamic intolerance, which is not sanctioned by the Quran."³⁴⁸ But what fails to be recognised in such a view is that although Islamisation is in many ways a foreign process injected into the normally more passive, moderate forms of Islam that have traditionally been characteristic of Southeast Asian Muslims, globalisation has brought emphases and trends to Malaysia from other parts of the Muslim world. This is borne out by the NECF's Religious Liberty Commission which reported in 2008 that in comparison to previous years, serious religious matters are not being treated with the same degree of sensitivity. According to the report

there were multiple high-profile incidents, such as conversions out of Islam, destruction of places of worship, confiscation of religious material and enforced burials by religious authorities in 2007. Confronted with aggressive denials by the government that anything was wrong and the apparent unwillingness to do anything about them, all ethnic minorities, especially Malaysians of Indian origin, grew more overtly frustrated and resentful. This led to growing support for the Hindu Rights Action Force (HINDRAF) and for the subsequent street protests organised by it to voice the community's discontent.³⁴⁹

Those "deeply embedded" Southeast Asian values of pluralism and tolerance seem to many non-Muslim Malaysians to have faded and been replaced by the gradual erosion of civil and religious liberties.³⁵⁰ And although it is correct to recognise regional variations and characteristics within Islam as it is represented across the world, matters of tolerance

³⁴⁷. Wiking, *Breaking the Pot*, 75. Wiking believes many Christians, and particularly evangelicals, over-react and "tend to see the process of Islamisation literally as a question of life and death and to interpret all issues of Government impositions as exponents of Islamisation aimed at stamping out Christianity." (2004), 77. Islamisation may be present but (and Wiking quotes approvingly from Robert Hunt [1997] on this) difficulties encountered by non-Muslims may have more to do with administrative incompetence and corruption. Wiking does not, however, minimise the difficulties faced by Christian communities in Malaysia. His own conclusion is that "all threats to the survival of the church associated with Government impositions are primarily pointers to a possible future serious deterioration whereby the church will face mounting difficulties and be forced into a partly underground existence." (2004), 91.

³⁴⁸. Wiking, *Breaking the Pot*, 75.

³⁴⁹. NECF *Religious Liberty After 50 Years of Independence*, 160.

³⁵⁰. See Nathaniel Tan and John Lee, *Religion Under Siege? Lina Joy, the Islamic State and Freedom of Faith* (Kuala Lumpur: Kinibooks, 2008); Lee Min Choon, *Freedom of Religion in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999).

or intolerance, peace or violence in Islam do not entirely rest on cultural or regional proclivity. Globalisation has undoubtedly injected emphases into the Islamisation process first begun in Malaysia in the 1980s, and has exacerbated an issue within Islam which is not sufficiently considered by those who state that intolerance is not sanctioned by the Quran. There is an important hermeneutical question here for Muslims because of the ambiguities created by the Islamic doctrine of abrogation, which holds that later revelations in the Quran can abrogate, or contradict, earlier revelations. Earlier Meccan revelations may be abrogated by later Medinan revelations. The complexity involved in the question of tolerance or intolerance, peace or violence within Islam, is that peaceful verses in the Quran which honour Christians and Jews are predominantly of the earlier Meccan revelations, with the more aggressive verses being found mostly in the Medinan. This hermeneutical tension is illustrated in Colin Chapman's comments about whether *jihad* is only defensive or if it can sometimes be offensive:

Some Qur'anic verses strongly condemn aggression: 'And fight (*qatilu*) for the cause of Allah those who fight you, but do not be aggressive. Surely Allah does not like the aggressors... Kill them wherever you find them and drive them out from wherever they drove you out. Sedition is worse than slaughter (*qatl*)... Fight them until there is no sedition and the religion becomes that of Allah...' (2:190-193).

There are other verses in the Qur'an, however, which include very strong and clear calls to Muslims to fight. One of the best known is the so-called 'sword verse': 'Then, when the Sacred Months are over, kill the idolaters wherever you find them, take them [as captives], besiege them, and lie in wait for them at every point of observation. If they repent afterwards, perform the prayer and pay the alms, then release them...' (9:5).

Many Muslims are aware of the differences of tone between verses encouraging an aggressive approach and those that are much more moderate. Some scholars argue that every verse of this kind needs to be understood in the context in which it was revealed to the Prophet, and cannot therefore be made the basis for a general rule. Others, however, have argued that the stronger verses abrogate the earlier verses which condemn aggression.³⁵¹

³⁵¹. Colin Chapman, "'Islamic Terrorism': How Should Christians and the West Respond?" *Redcliffe College: Encounters Mission E-zine* Issue 5 (April, 2005): 8.

To assert, as Wiking does, that intolerance is not sanctioned in the Quran, requires some acknowledgement that this sort of ambiguity does exist within Islam and can impact the way non-Muslim minorities are treated in Muslim majority countries. And there is also the need to account for the real issues non-Muslim communities face 'on the ground', particularly the question of freedom of religious conversion, which represents one of the stiffest tests to Muslim tolerance towards the non-Muslim community in Malaysia.³⁵²

The Christian church exists as a multi-ethnic community in a divided society

Thirdly, Malaysia is not only a majority Muslim country, but a diverse, multi-ethnic and multi-faith society. This means the church must play its part in cultivating positive inter-ethnic relations, building relationships of trust with the other faith communities, paying close attention to the attitude and manner in which Christian evangelism and mission are carried out. The Malaysian church occupies a unique place among all the faith communities in Malaysia. As Robert Hunt reminds us,

The Christian community is the only community in Malaysia that has no single dominant ethnic component, and which embraces all ethnic groups with the exception of Malays. And even this last caveat is misleading, since the Christian community embraces substantial numbers of the pri-bumi peoples (Sengoi, Iban, Kadazan, Melanau, etc.), some of whom are very closely related to the Malays linguistically, culturally and ethnically. The Christian community is likewise the only non-Muslim community in Malaysia with a substantial interest in the Malay language as a religious language. Malay Bibles have been in use for over a hundred and fifty years in Malaysia.³⁵³

³⁵². Chapman expresses a view that many non-Muslims would sympathise with in Malaysia: "However charitable we want to be, we have to reckon with the fact that in the majority of cases Muslims who want to become disciples of Christ are thought of and treated as apostates and outcasts from their family and community. Colin Chapman, *Cross and Crescent: Responding to the Challenge of Islam* (Leicester: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 270. See John Aglionby, "Over his dead body", *The Guardian*, (London), 30 December, 2005, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2005/dec/30/worlddispatch/> (accessed 10 March, 2009); "Let the Court Decide", *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), 30 December, 2005, p. 1; "The Moorthy Story" in *Berita NECF* (Petaling Jaya: NECF, January-February, 2006): 3-7; *Unity Threatened by Continuing Infringements Of Religious Freedom: Note of Protest by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism*, (Kuala Lumpur: MCCBCHST, 2007).

³⁵³. Robert A. Hunt, "A Response by Robert A. Hunt" in Ng Kam Weng, *The Quest for Covenant Community*, (2008), 118.

But although the multi-ethnic make-up of the Malaysian church has the advantage of spanning the ethnic divides, the churches are in reality segregated both in their local congregational expression as well as in their organisational, denominational structures. Local churches are often organised along language and ethnic lines, and denominations such as the Methodists are organised into ethno-linguistic tracks: English, Tamil, Chinese, and Iban. The plural society of Malaysia therefore necessitates positive inter-ethnic relations, dialogue and co-operation inside the church as well as out.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined the socio-historical context of the Malaysian churches, a context which presents challenges and possible hindrances to the reconciling mission which we saw in chapter one is given to all churches. One of those hindrances is the experience of state interference in religious liberties, resulting, among other things, in churches becoming more introspective and preoccupied with their own survival. Furthermore, the socio-historical context also shows how ethnically diverse and complex Malaysian society is today. Herein lies another potential hindrance to the reconciling mission of the churches. Even though the Malaysian church as a whole is inclusive of all ethnic groups, the segregation noted above suggests that ethnic identity is emphasised over and above membership of the global body of Christ. If this is indeed the case, it would certainly be understandable in the light of Malay nationalism and the accompanying chauvinistic policies of the last forty years. In such a context non-Malay ethnic groups seek to strengthen their own cultural identity, each fearful of the dilution of their own ethnic distinctives.

Having described the socio-political context from a formal historico-sociological point of view, the following chapter will again take up the socio-political context but this time seek to describe it from the findings of a survey questionnaire.

Chapter 3:

The Socio-political Context of Malaysia as Reflected in the Findings of a Survey on Attitudes of Malaysian Christians to the Church's Role in Malaysian Society

*Statistics is the plural of anecdote.*³⁵⁴

In chapter one we set out a theology of reconciliation and its relevance to mission, noting that until recently, the themes of reconciliation and peacemaking have been conspicuous by their absence in many prominent texts on mission theology. Then, since this research must be set in its Malaysian context, chapter two provided a survey of the history of the nation by looking at Malaysia's Islamic background, its colonial experience, independence from British rule, the subsequent task of nation-building and the accompanying quest for national unity. The socio-historical context set out in chapter two identified certain challenges facing churches in 21st century Malaysia.

In this chapter we look for further insight into the socio-political context of Malaysia by using a survey questionnaire on attitudes of certain Malaysian Christians to the church's role in society. The aim of the chapter is to set out the purpose and method of the questionnaire, and to describe the main findings. The questionnaire itself appears as an appendix at the end of this chapter on page 172.

Outcomes from this chapter will inform the themes taken up for exposition in chapter four. The survey questionnaire therefore plays an important role in supporting the basic aims

³⁵⁴. Daniel P. Moynihan, quoted in L. D. Eigen and J. P. Siegel, *Dictionary of Political Quotations* (London: Robert Hale, 1994), 470.

and objectives of the thesis, since it allows us to listen to the views and opinions of a cross-section of Malaysian Christians on topics that relate to the themes of mission, reconciliation and peacemaking. Rather than reserve this chapter for an Appendix it has been included in the main text because it describes social research that has not been attempted before in any of the Christian communities in Malaysia. It also has direct influence on the themes that form the core of chapter four, and is therefore a key element of the overall thesis.

Method

This section outlines the research method and describes how and why it was designed and administered.³⁵⁵ We begin, however, with a brief note on the discipline of missiology and its use of social research.

A Note on the Discipline of Missiology

Missiology is a discipline within the field of theology and religious studies. It is concerned with academic reflection on the mission of the Christian church and is normally taught within the practical theology department of the seminary. Describing missiology as “the ordered study of the Christian church’s mission”, J. Andrew Kirk holds that “every aspect

³⁵⁵. Definition of terms: 'Method' - a particular approach to social research; a series of steps and techniques for gathering and analysing data. 'Methodology' - the theory of how research should be carried out; a way of thinking about and studying social reality. 'Research paradigm' - a point of view, or "a framework of thinking about how research ought to be conducted to ascertain truth." [Pat Cryer, *The Research Student's Guide to Success* (Buckingham: Open University Press, 2000), 77]. 'Sample' - a population subset. 'Sampling units' - "Elements of the population that are chosen to be included in the sample." [Lisa McIntyre, *Need to Know: Sociological Research Methods* (New York: McGraw-Hill, 2005), 95]. 'Survey' - a method used to gather data from a sample. 'Statistic' - "a number that describes some attribute of the elements in a sample." [McIntyre, *Need to Know* (2005), 95]. It is important to differentiate between 'method' on the one hand, and 'methodology' and 'research paradigm' on the other. Cryer explains: "A rationale for the methods used to gather and process data, in what sequence and on what samples, together constitute a research methodology. This is not a grand term for 'list of methods', but an informed and properly argued case for designing a piece of research in a particular way." [Cryer, *The Research Student* (2000), 63].

of theology has an inescapably missiological dimension, for each one exists for the sake of the church's mission."³⁵⁶ As such, missiology includes four main areas of study: biblical, doctrinal, historical, and cultural, all of which can be found within this current thesis. The fourth area, that of cultural studies, is necessary because the task of mission involves the church understanding the relationship between the gospel message and the various human cultural contexts in which that message is communicated and takes root.³⁵⁷ In connection with this last point, it is in order to assist our understanding of the relationship between the gospel and the context in which discipleship occurs that social research methods, such as surveys, are carried out. Such methods are therefore not unusual in the department of practical theology. When care is given to method and when data is used responsibly, statistical techniques can powerfully illuminate a major issue.

The Purpose of the Questionnaire

This research project recognises the importance of incorporating the views of Malaysian Christians into the overall thesis. The writings of Malaysian theologians and church leaders on issues such as national unity and the role of the churches in nation building may not be plentiful, but what does exist is obtainable through journals, books and various papers stored in seminary libraries. Less accessible, on the other hand, are the views of ordinary, church-going Malaysians. But given the complexities of Malaysian society, including the church, it has been important for this thesis that a wider circumference of viewpoints be

³⁵⁶. J. Andrew Kirk, "Missiology", in Sinclair Ferguson, J. I. Packer (eds) *New Dictionary of Theology* (Leicester: IVP, 1988), 434.

³⁵⁷. This definition of cultural studies is a specific one, being normally found in literature concerned with mission studies. More broadly, cultural studies is an academic field of study in its own right and is, as Simon During points out, concerned with "the study of culture, or, more particularly, the study of *contemporary* culture." Like its counterpart in mission studies, cultural studies is "a field within multidisciplinary..." As During puts it, "Within the academy it is best regarded as an area to work in alongside others, usually more highly institutionalised disciplines - Spanish, geography, politics, economics, literature... whatever." Simon During (ed) *The Cultural Studies Reader*. Third Edition (London: Routledge, 2007), 1, 28-29.

gathered. But how should one obtain the views and attitudes of ordinary church members on sensitive issues like politics, race, identity, and the role of the churches in Malaysian society? Forums for discussing and debating such issues are few and far-between both within and outside the context of the church. Various options for obtaining such viewpoints would include conducting face-to-face interviews, using telephone interviews, self-administered questionnaires, or a combination of some, or all, of these.³⁵⁸ The method deemed most appropriate for gathering the type of information required to support the present thesis, was to design a survey instrument such as a questionnaire. The reasons for this choice and the benefits ensuing from it will be outlined below.

This survey questionnaire was designed to help identify attitudes among Malaysian Christians concerning various dimensions of Christian mission and social engagement. Identifying these attitudes may help us understand the level of current involvement of Malaysian churches as peacemakers and reconciling agents in society. The survey was aimed at particular denominational groups across East and West Malaysia, and was made available in the three major languages used in Malaysia: English, Chinese, and Malay. We now turn to discuss the design and administration of the survey instrument.

Ethical Guidelines

Questions that touch on the subjects of race, religion and politics can be sensitive and controversial in Malaysia. Careful consideration was given as to what kinds of questions would be appropriate and how such questions should be asked within the parameters of a brief questionnaire. Given such sensitivities, it was important to provide respondents with

³⁵⁸. According to Allan G. Johnson, telephone interviews are "more often associated with commercial and political opinion polling than with serious sociological research." *The Blackwell Dictionary of Sociology: A User's Guide to Sociological Language* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), 320.

clear assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. On these matters the researcher has followed the Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice set out by the Association of Social Anthropologists of the UK and the Commonwealth.³⁵⁹

Sampling: The Selection of Churches for the Survey

An explanation regarding the choice of churches selected for the survey questionnaire has been set out in the introduction to this thesis.

Design of the Survey Instrument

In general terms, the aim of a survey is “to measure variables by asking people questions and then to examine the relationships among the measures.”³⁶⁰ Survey design involves consideration of survey mode. This research used self-administered questionnaires which were completed by groups of respondents in a room or church setting in which the researcher was present as facilitator. Unlike a mailed questionnaire, or on-line version, the researcher was personally present to introduce the survey, provide basic guidelines and collect the completed questionnaires. Factors that determined this particular combination of survey mode included cost, geographical coverage, context for administering the survey, and the type of questions that needed to be asked. Being personally present to administer the survey allowed a careful explanation of the research project and also enabled the researcher to be available to answer questions and facilitate informal study groups once the data was gathered. This was therefore a self-administered questionnaire completed in the presence of the researcher who was also available to provide clarification and assistance as appropriate.

³⁵⁹. ASA, Ethical Guidelines for Good Research Practice, www.theasa.org/ Accessed 13th November, 2007.

³⁶⁰. Singleton, Royce A. Jr. and Bruce C. Straits, *Approaches to Social Research*, Fourth Edition (New York / Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 228.

Topic Areas for Questions

At its broadest, the survey was designed to discover attitudes of Malaysian Christians to the church's role in society, especially in connection to the church's role as an agent of reconciliation. With both the theological framework of chapter one and the socio-historical background of chapter two in mind, the survey needed to incorporate questions covering a range of themes: the scope of mission; the social implications of the gospel of reconciliation; nation-building and the role of the church in politics; Christianity and other religions; evangelism in a multi-faith context; Malaysian Christian identity; racial integration in society and in the church. These themes were incorporated into eighteen questions, often using more than one question to gather a response on a given theme.

Since the questionnaire was designed for use in the local church setting during a normal Sunday service of worship, the following key aspects required further consideration: the language used, the formulation of questions, the placement of sensitive questions, and the overall length of the questionnaire.

Language

Questions were designed to be clear, concise, sufficiently brief, and given the topics covered in the survey, absent of theological jargon. The vocabulary had to be suitable for the respondents the research was to focus on. Those questions dealing with sensitive issues such as race and identity, were constructed in non-threatening ways, using wording that was as tactful and diplomatic as possible.

Formulation of Questions

The formulation of questions went through several drafts, enabling the questionnaire to become more focused. The final draft of the questionnaire saw the questions follow a

certain progression. For instance, the first number of questions are straightforward and less complex, therefore encouraging the respondent to proceed further. Questions requiring a more thoughtful response are contained in the latter half of the questionnaire, particularly questions dealing with sensitive issues. Those questions asking for a range of personal details from the respondent are kept until the end.

Types of Questions

Various types of questions have been used in the questionnaire. One is an open-ended question but most are multiple choice, and closed-ended, calling for precise, measurable answers. Others are ranking questions and some use the Likert response format which provides a number of options for the respondent to choose from, for instance: 'strongly agree' to 'strongly disagree'. Also included was a hypothetical question describing a concrete situation to which a respondent must say what should be done (or not done) in that situation. A varied set of questions helps to retain respondents' interest and, as we will note below, provides some protection from response bias.

Sensitive Questions

Special consideration was given as to how sensitive questions could be used in the survey instrument. This particular questionnaire asks a range of questions that deal with topics that most Malaysians would agree are sensitive: politics, race, ethnicity, citizenship, and other religions. Appropriate vocabulary was sought for use in such questions which were then placed between the middle and the end of the questionnaire. Most importantly, the researcher needed to give certain assurances. When introducing the questionnaire, assurances were given regarding the worthwhile nature of the research and therefore of the importance for respondents to answer sensitive questions. Respondents were also assured

of the confidentiality of the answers they would provide, together with any personal information they were asked to give.

Questionnaire Length

The questionnaire contains eighteen questions spread over two sides of an A4 page. It was designed to be completed within an average time of ten minutes (this was considered a reasonable amount of time for completing the questionnaire in an allocated time-slot during, or at the end of, a service of corporate worship).

Pilot Questionnaires

Using pilot versions of a survey is essential for providing evaluation, making sure that questions are phrased in ways that make sense to respondents and helping to identify questions that might be confusing or cause misunderstanding. Pilot versions of the questionnaire were conducted among small groups of people who were similar to those of the target group. The results of this refining process saw the questionnaire change in several ways. Firstly, the initial design was felt to be too long, extending to three pages of A4. Reducing the questionnaire to two A4 pages made it more manageable. This meant reformatting the design of the survey, slightly reducing the total number and word length of questions, while at the same time ensuring that the important questions were still asked to gather the necessary information. Secondly, theological jargon was removed and the questions asked were formulated, as far as possible, in ways that did not assume knowledge of theological terms. Thirdly, vocabulary in general was simplified so that the questionnaire could be completed by respondents whose first language may not be English. Fourthly, a greater variety of question types were introduced. Question sets were re-ordered, and in particular, those questions asking for personal details were moved from the start of the questionnaire and inserted towards the end. Finally, an opening paragraph was

added to give some brief background to the researcher, the purpose of the research, together with assurances of anonymity.

When the design and content had been settled, the questionnaire was then translated into Chinese and Malay. Both language versions were checked for accuracy and all language versions of the questionnaire were cross-checked to ensure consistency in meaning.

Given the sensitive nature of the subject matter, some brief background to the questionnaire was provided together with an assurance of anonymity to the respondent.

The questionnaire begins with the following statement:

As you know, ethnic relations continue to be a matter of concern to Christians in Malaysia. This survey aims to explore Christian attitudes to politics and reconciliation. This is part of an academic research project carried out by Peter Rowan, a member of OMF International, currently lecturing in Missiology at Malaysia Bible Seminary.

All replies are anonymous.

Gaining Permission and the Administration of the Survey Instrument

Having selected the four denominational blocks as the focus for the questionnaire, consideration was then given as to which individual congregations and in which locations the questionnaire should be used. From the beginning, the intention was to use the questionnaire in both East and West Malaysia. Since it is physically impossible for an individual researcher to cover extensive areas of the country (particularly the rural parts), principal centres were targeted. In East Malaysia, churches in the cities of Kuching and Miri (the major centres of the state of Sarawak), were invited to participate. In West Malaysia, churches in the Federal Territory of Kuala Lumpur and in the neighbouring state of Selangor were targeted. (See Figure 3.1).

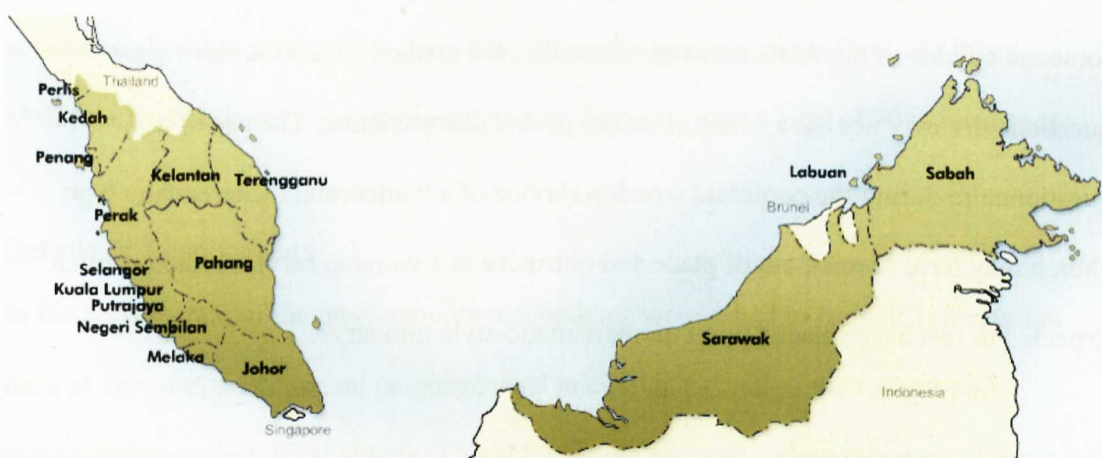


Figure 3.1 Map of Malaysia

Several churches from each denominational group were contacted in each location and invited to participate in the project. Letters and e-mails providing some background to the research topic and the purpose of the questionnaire were sent to Church leaders in the three main areas of Kuala Lumpur, Selangor and Sarawak. It was important to gain the trust of the church Pastor, who was in effect the gatekeeper whose positive response would allow access to the congregation. Some leaders were not willing to have their congregations participate, but on the whole responses were positive.³⁶¹ The exception to this generally positive response were certain congregations within the Pentecostal grouping of churches. Having written to senior pastors from several churches, I received a less than enthusiastic response. Alternative gatekeepers were found at a traditionally recognised training college for the Assembly of God denomination. Several senior academics facilitated contact with a number of churches, but in comparison to the other church groups, the response was slow. This meant that overall 328 out of a total of 3042 responses were from Pentecostal / Independent Christians. There are several possible reasons for this low response. Firstly, senior academics within the Pentecostal church network have suggested that AOG

³⁶¹. Following the visit to a participating church, the pastor would speak to other church leaders recommending that their congregations also participate in the project. The questionnaire therefore widened out considerably in terms of church involvement.

churches in Malaysia may be suspicious of research carried out on their congregations by someone outside of the AOG network. Secondly, the method for administering the questionnaire may not have suited churches of this denomination. The use of a questionnaire during the corporate worship service of a Pentecostal / Charismatic type church may have seemed out of place and obtrusive in a worship service which is often expected to reach a climactic point of charismatic-style ministry.

Whilst a certain amount of management was possible in terms of locations chosen and churches contacted, in the final analysis the use of the questionnaire was dependent upon permission being granted from individual church leaders. The following four stages outline the process of gaining permission and using the questionnaire in a church setting.

- I. The church Pastor was contacted by telephone, letter or e-mail. The research project was explained and permission requested for the survey to be used in the congregation. A copy of the questionnaire was supplied to the Pastor.
- II. Following an invitation from the Pastor to use the questionnaire in his congregation, a suitable date was agreed together with the details of how the questionnaire would be administered.
- III. On the agreed day the researcher provided basic instructions to the congregation for completing the questionnaire. Several stewards assisted with the distribution of the survey forms and their return to the researcher upon completion.
- IV. At the end of the worship service an informal focus group would gather to discuss issues raised in the questionnaire.

Over a period of ten months (August 2005 – June 2006), the questionnaire was used in seventeen churches among four main denominational groups across East and West Malaysia, and in three major language groups. This provided a total of 3042 responses.

Details of Respondents

In the final section of the questionnaire respondents were asked to provide information such as age, sex, predominant language used in church, as well as their status and responsibility in their local church. This information gives us a clearer picture of those who took part in the survey.

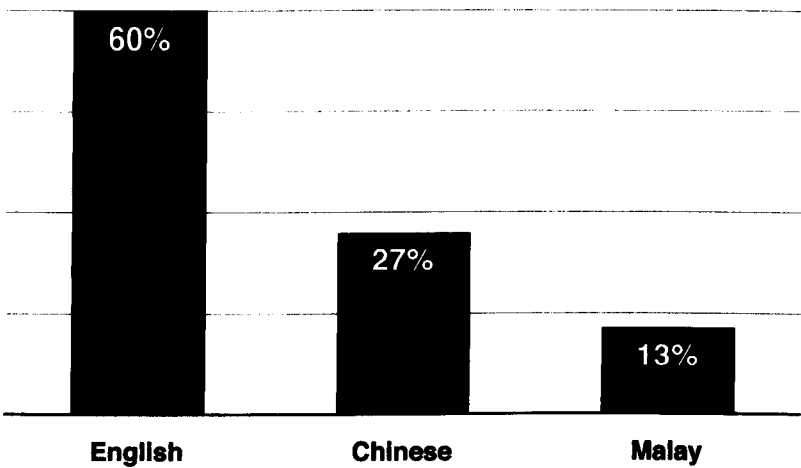


Figure 3.2 Survey participation by predominant language used in church

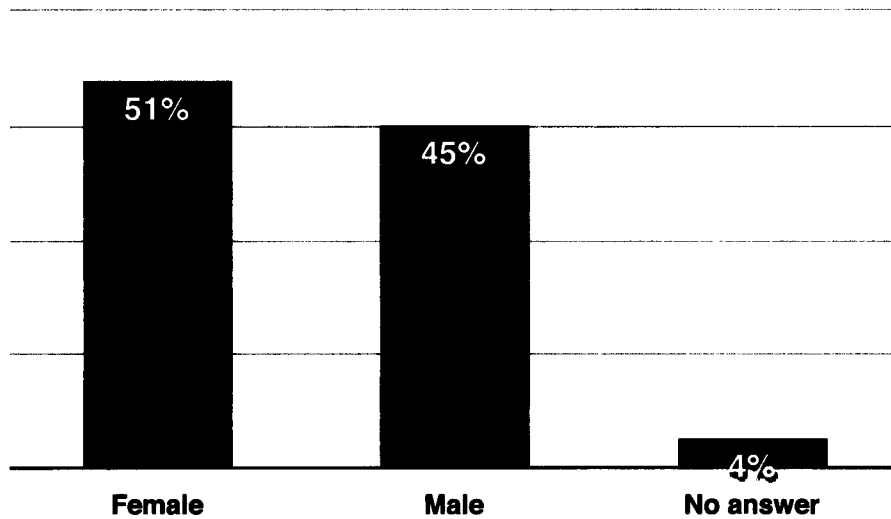


Figure 3.3 Survey participation by gender

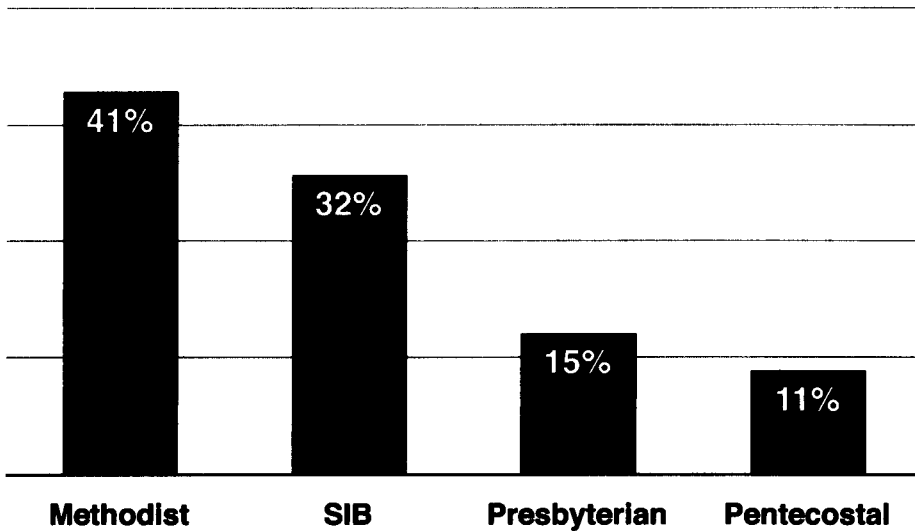


Figure 3.4 Survey participation by denomination

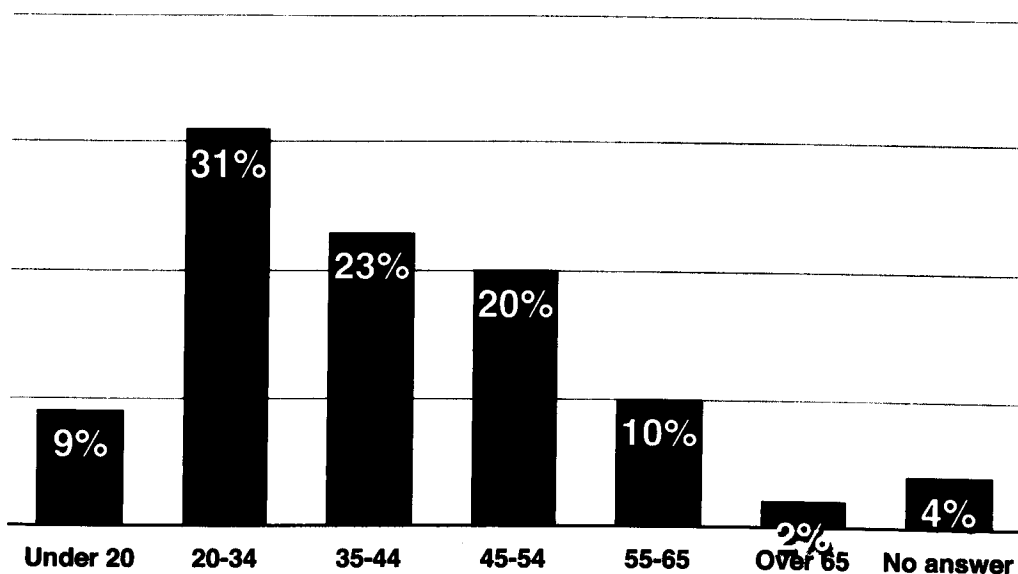


Figure 3.5 Survey participation by age

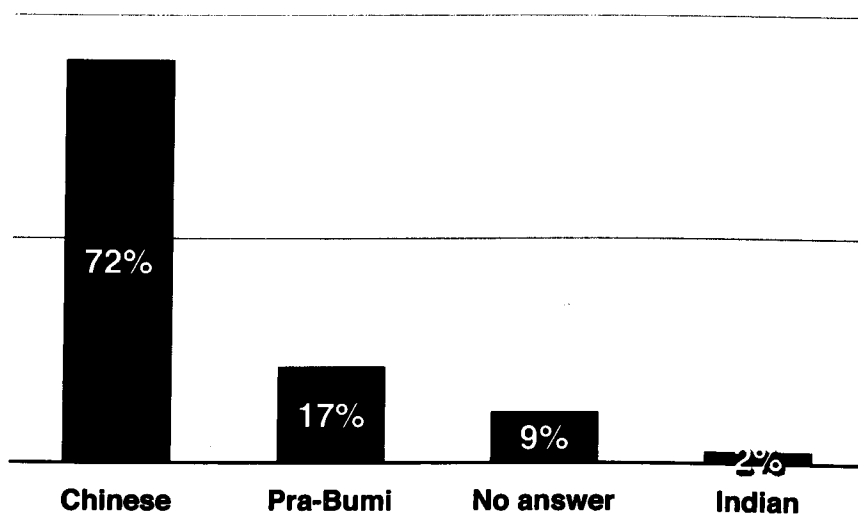


Figure 3.6 Survey participation by race/ethnic group

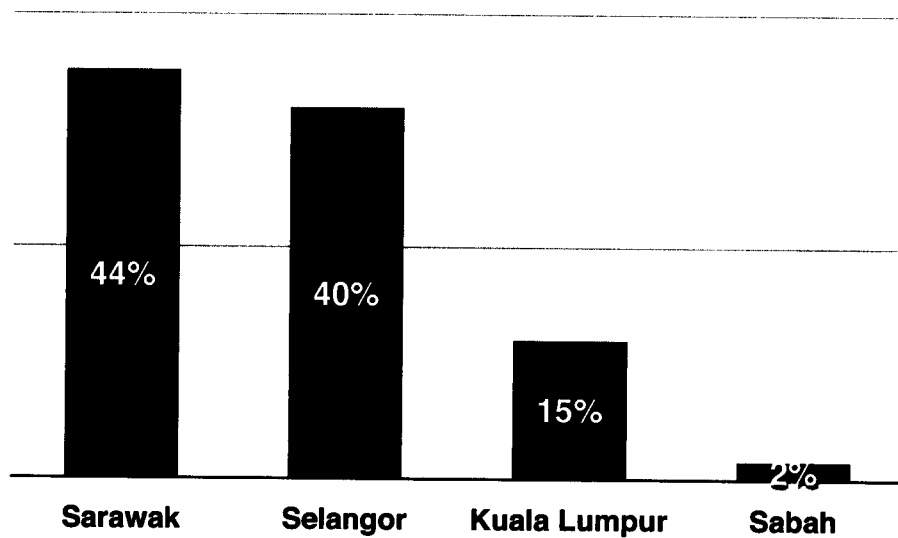


Figure 3.7 Survey participation by church location

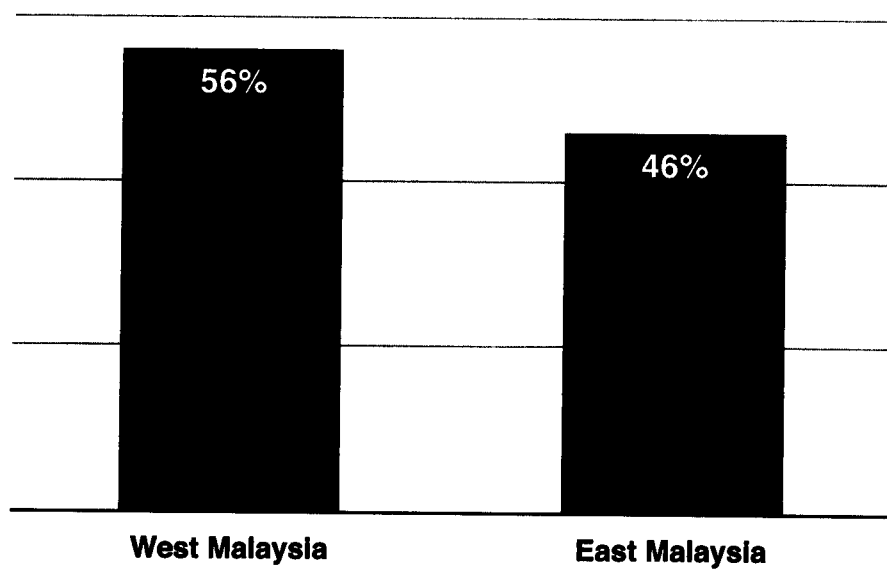


Figure 3.8 Survey participation by geographical area

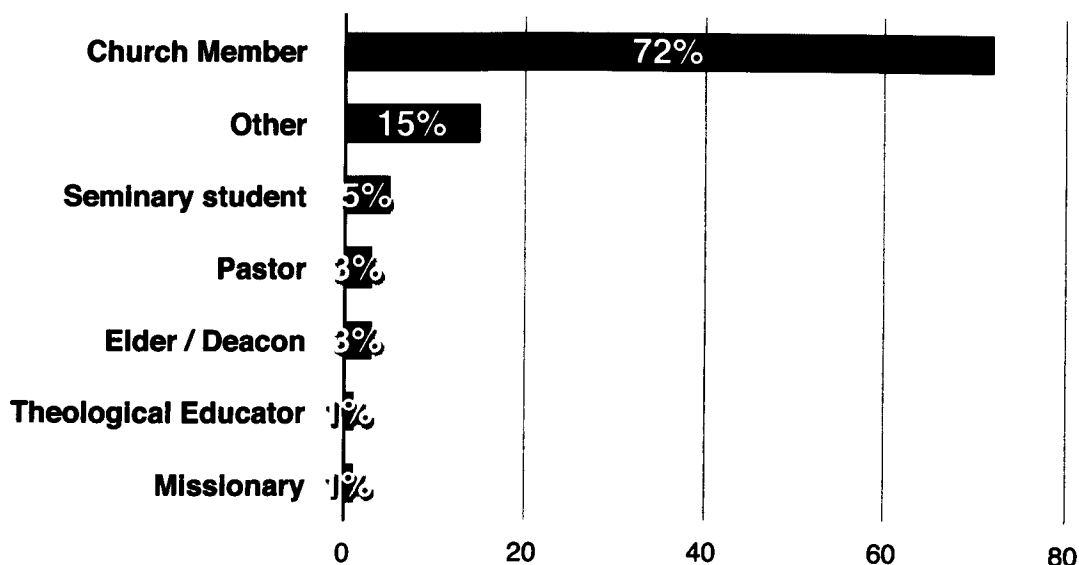


Figure 3.9 Survey participation by membership status and role in church

Processing the Data

Each questionnaire within each completed set was numbered and labelled using the congregation's name, location and language. A code-book was written up and independent variables were identified. The data from each questionnaire was entered into SPSS,³⁶² a statistical analysis software programme, from which tables were produced. Although the questionnaire gathered information across a range of categories, the analysis of the quantitative elements of the questions was based on the following key areas: language used in church, church denomination, and geographical location - that is, East or West Malaysia. For the open ended question (which asked for an example of a local church initiative that encouraged national unity) a form of content analysis was used where elements of the data were assigned units of meaning and then recognised as emergent themes. Five units of meaning were used: pray/prayer; community/social/orphanage/old peoples' home/environment; medical/HIV/AIDS/Drugs/relief; church/churches/denomination/inter-

³⁶² Statistical Package for the Social Sciences.

church/inter-faith; celebration/festival/culture. These represented the themes of spirituality, community activity, medical project, church-based ministry, and cultural interaction.

Potential Limitations of a Survey as a Research Instrument

Inability to Observe Behaviour

First, surveys are good at reporting but not observing behaviour. In reporting their behaviour by completing a questionnaire, a respondent may not be truthful, may not have understood a question, have difficulty recalling past events about which they are being asked, and may generally waver in their opinions about various issues. Also, because a survey provides only a 'snap-shot' of responses from a particular person in a specific place, a survey may not help us to understand the context of the respondent, nor to understand their behaviour over a longer period of time.

Social Acceptability Factor

The second, and perhaps more serious weakness, has to do with what is described as the social acceptability factor. Also known as the Hawthorne effect, this occurs when respondents modify their behaviour because they know they are the subjects of research. In other words, it is the recognition that researchers have an unintended influence on their subjects. Singleton and Straits point out that "surveys are susceptible to reactivity, which introduces systematic measurement error."³⁶³ This means that "many respondents will want to make a good impression on the researcher by appearing sensible, healthy, happy, mentally sound, free of racial prejudice, and the like."³⁶⁴ The design of a survey research instrument must therefore take this into account and consider carefully what strategies can

³⁶³. Singleton and Straits, *Approaches*, 227.

³⁶⁴. Ibid, 293.

be employed to help overcome the tendency of respondents to provide socially desirable answers, particularly when faced with sensitive questions.

Double Negative Conundrum

This is a potential limitation relating specifically to question 11 of the survey: "Consider this statement: 'We should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society'." Respondents are given a range to choose from: disagree strongly; disagree, uncertain, agree, agree strongly. The potential problem here is this: in giving respondents the option of choosing a negative ("disagree"), might they get confused when the proposition to be considered is itself a negative? While acknowledging that the wording of such a question might be confusing, certain aspects of the research method provide reassurance that this was not the case. Firstly, the use of a preliminary study in the form of pilot questionnaires tested the understanding of the question. Secondly, the questionnaire was personally administered to a large and diverse number of respondents and there were no queries regarding the meaning of the question. We can therefore assume that question 11 was understood correctly.

Techniques for Overcoming Survey Weaknesses

On the inability of a survey to observe behaviour, it should be noted that the thesis is not dependent upon the results of the survey research alone. The survey provides a 'snap-shot' which needs to be viewed within wider contexts. Those wider contexts are the theological and the historical, and these are set out in other chapters. The theological and historical contexts may be considered as forming part of the field (or observational) research - bringing observation and analysis from other quarters which, alongside the results of the survey, may provide a clearer understanding of the issues which form the focus of this thesis.

On reducing response bias with regard to social acceptability, several techniques can help minimise this weakness: the use of direct questions, the careful placement of questions in the questionnaire, and the careful wording of sensitive questions. Most importantly, the researcher needs to fully inform respondents on the confidentiality of the information they provide. Respondents must be assured that their particular answers will never be used against them. The survey questionnaire that concerns this chapter was introduced in each particular setting with a verbal assurance of confidentiality for the respondents and the survey form clearly states that all responses will be treated as anonymous.

Potential Strengths of the Survey as a Research Instrument

For research questions that require knowing what people think about something, and who those people are, survey research is one of the best methods available to the researcher. Survey questionnaires are useful for obtaining information from large numbers of people. As well as providing answers to specific questions, surveys can be used to obtain other information about respondents, such as age, sex, ethnic group, language and religious affiliation. Surveys are also an effective means for “obtaining information about things that cannot be observed directly, such as ‘attitudes’.”³⁶⁵

The survey research described in this chapter has the following potential strengths:

- I. No previous survey of this kind was found to have been attempted among Malaysian churches. No examples of questions of this nature were found to have been asked in any previous research.

³⁶⁵. McIntyre, *Sociological Research Methods*, 120.

- II. This project brings us data from a relatively wide range of Malaysian Christians on issues that one could argue are among the most pressing and challenging facing churches in Malaysian society today.
- III. The survey was carried out among Christians who attend Sunday services. Some observers might suggest that since they are regular church attenders they should be described as 'committed Christians' - a sub-set within the overall Christian community, and therefore not typical. However, Christianity is a growing religion in Malaysia, and those Christians who completed the questionnaire are arguably representative of Protestant Christians in Malaysia who are characteristically highly committed, regular in church attendance and vibrant in the expression of their faith.³⁶⁶
- IV. Although the results of the survey do show some differences along denominational lines, generally however, there is more harmony than discord, and the results may therefore provide a fairly unified response across the denominational spectrum covered in this research.³⁶⁷
- V. Given the sensitive nature of some of the questions, an outsider may hope to receive a more reliable response than if a Malaysian were to carry out a similar questionnaire. The social acceptability factor must still be taken into account, but this may be reduced if someone from outside the target community is conducting the research.

³⁶⁶. See Susan F. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Sacred Tensions: Modernity and Religious Transformation in Malaysia* (University of South Carolina Press, 1997).

³⁶⁷. On how and why denominational differences are becoming less distinctive, see Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Church Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001). Though without reference to the Malaysian context, the authors provide examples from elsewhere of how denominational differences and loyalties have become less important. Christians move across denominational boundaries more easily and this has facilitated a degree of borrowing, adaptation and assimilation, for instance, in the areas of corporate worship and leadership structures.

VI. With the limitations of the survey method duly noted, we have good reason to suggest that given the design of the survey, the choice of denominations, together with the geographical and ethnic spread of respondents, there are sufficient grounds to argue that the survey is a good indicator of current views among evangelical Christians in Malaysia.

Existing Questions and Previous Research

Existing questions are considered as valuable raw material for the construction of a research survey. If previous research exists, the questions drawn from questionnaires or interviews used in that research can be incorporated and adapted into a new research survey.

As far as this research is concerned, no survey like it has previously been used among Christian communities in Malaysia. However, some of the key questions have been asked before under different circumstances and in various contexts. For instance, questions about citizenship and emigration have been asked by Hwa Yung in two journal articles and a conference paper.³⁶⁸ Questions surrounding the contribution of the Christian churches to national unity in Malaysia have formed the basis for conference papers as well as several articles in both academic journals and popular level Christian periodicals in Malaysia.³⁶⁹

³⁶⁸. For instance see Hwa Yung, "Should Christians Emigrate?" in *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*, Petaling Jaya: Kairos Research Centre (October, 2006), 20-23. This is an adapted version of an earlier publication - *Christian Thinking on Emigration*, Graduates' Christian Fellowship, Malaysia (Petaling Jaya: GCF, 1987). The conference paper which briefly raises the question of emigration is Hwa Yung, "Sustaining and Enhancing Integration through Strategies of Change", in *National Integration and Unity - The Church's Response*, Report of the Christian Federation of Malaysia 7th National Christian Conference, 20-22 October, 2005, (Petaling Jaya: Christian Federation of Malaysia, 2007), 59-67. See also Goh Keat Peng, "Church and State in Malaysia" in *Transformation* Vol. 16 no. 3 (1989): 16-20.

³⁶⁹. For instance, James P. Ongkili, *Nation-Building in Malaysia 1946-1974* (1985); K. J. John, "National Unity: The Goal of Government Policies" (1986), Richard Dorall, "The Contribution of Malaysian Christians to National Unity" (1986); Thu En Yu, "The Churches Ministry of Nation Building and National Integration", (2002), Hwa Yung, "Sustaining and Enhancing Integration

Topics such as race, politics, national unity, mission, identity, Christianity and other religions - all of these are relatively common themes and receive varying degrees of coverage in national daily newspapers, Christian periodicals, local church web-sites and more recently, on internet blog sites.

Therefore, while no formal social research among the Christians in Malaysia has been carried out in this way before, many of the questions contained in the questionnaire are recognised by respondents as being current questions; that is, they are recognised as questions that deserve to be asked because they are believed to be relevant and have been aired before, often in muted form, in various contexts, though not normally in such a way that people are given the opportunity to respond.

Although there is no evidence of any previous survey of this kind having been carried out among churches in Malaysia, a public opinion poll asking for views on ethnic relations was conducted by a Malaysian based research centre between February and March, 2006. Some of the questions included in the Merdeka Centre poll touch on similar themes to those contained in the questionnaire forming the basis of this chapter. Where appropriate, the findings of the Merdeka Centre research will be referred to below.³⁷⁰

through *Strategies of Change*", (2005).

³⁷⁰. The Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research is based in Selangor, Malaysia. The main findings of the poll formed part of a series of newspaper articles in the *New Straits Times*. For instance, A. Kathirasen, "We Are United, Feel Proud and Lucky But..." *New Straits Times*, Kuala Lumpur, Monday, 20th March, 2006. A PDF file containing the complete results of the poll was obtained from Merdeka Centre.

Description of the Data

Having stated the objectives behind the research, explained why the survey instrument was chosen as the most appropriate method for gathering the desired information, and having described the design and administration of the survey questionnaire, what now follows is a brief examination of the key results for each of the eighteen questions. Where it is felt that a more graphic illustration of the results would assist the reader, bar-charts and graphs have been used.³⁷¹

In turning to describe the findings of the survey, a word of caution is appropriate with regard to the use of statistics. Gerald Anderson, former editor of the respected journal, *International Bulletin of Missionary Research*, which publishes the Annual Statistical Table on Global Mission, has observed that "Compilation and analysis of mission statistics is a very tenuous business...". He went on to say the following in one of his editorials:

Statistics have been known to baffle ordinary mortals. Others use statistics with little appreciation of the potential for misapplication. Valid statistics are difficult both to assemble and to interpret.³⁷²

We approach the rest of this chapter with these comments in mind. Our strategy is not to proceed through every question individually, but to identify and group those areas in which there is general and high levels of agreement across all categories. This may mean

^{371.} A word of explanation is in order with regard to some of the terminology used in this section. The reader will be aware by now that the survey that concerns this chapter was conducted across three languages - Chinese, English, and Malay. In the descriptive comments that follow, and in the headings for some of the bar-charts and graphs, the reader should understand that, for instance, the percentages quoted for each of these groupings refers to the responses given by Chinese, English, or Malay speaking Christians who were surveyed in a Christian congregation in which Chinese, English, or Malay is the predominant language used.

^{372.} Gerald Anderson, "Mission and Statistics: Use with Care," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 19 no. 1 (January 1995), 1.

commenting on questions without following their order in the questionnaire. We will then turn to examine those areas in which important differences are clearly evident.

Areas of High Level Agreement

Christian Involvement in Community Projects

In the first instance we see wide and substantial agreement with regard to Christian involvement in community projects such as health and education, with 97 percent of respondents indicating that Christians should be involved in such projects.

Christian Mission Involves Working for Peace and Reconciliation

We find clear agreement that Christian mission should include peacemaking and reconciliation initiatives in divided societies. A total of 88 percent of respondents agreed with this understanding of Christian mission, with both Chinese and English speaking participants in particular registering a high 90 percent 'yes' response. Also, when asked if the Bible's teaching on reconciliation can be applied to the problems of racial division and ethnic tension, we find 80 percent of respondents saying 'yes'.

Reconciliation with God Transforms Relationships with Others

A convincing 91 percent agreed that reconciliation with God also transforms relationships with others. The majority of positive responses were found among Chinese and English language congregations. We do find, however, that among Malay speaking Christians the percentage drops to 66 percent, meaning that a surprising 30 percent of the Malay speaking Christians believe their relationships with others are not transformed as a result of being reconciled to God. From the denominational perspective, 'yes' responses were notably high (at 96 percent) among Pentecostal Christians. Further research would be necessary to investigate the reasons why Malay speaking respondents differ so significantly on this

particular question compared to the other two language groups. But see the next subsection, where, when presented with a concrete issue to which the Bible's teaching on reconciliation might be applied, the Malay speaking Christians respond much more positively. It would seem, perhaps, that Malay speaking respondents are not sure if their relationships with others *ought to* be transformed, but as the results for the next question show, those relationships *actually are* being transformed.

The Bible’s Teaching about Reconciliation can be Applied to the Problems of Racial Division and Ethnic Tension

Question 5: Do you think the Bible’s teaching about reconciliation can be applied to the problems of racial division and ethnic tension?

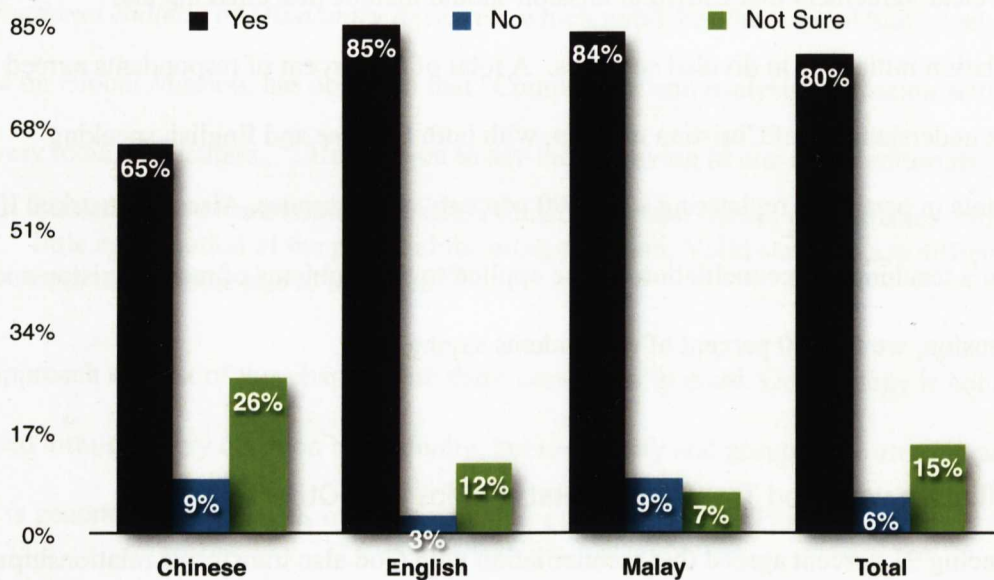


Figure 3.10 Survey question 5

An overall 80 percent of survey participants said the Bible’s teaching on reconciliation could be applied to racial and ethnic problems. However, there are some differences to be noted among the language and denominational categories. For instance, Chinese speaking Christians are less convinced about how the Bible’s teaching can be applied in this way, with 65 percent saying ‘yes’ and 26 percent choosing ‘not sure’. It is interesting to note that when survey participants were asked in the previous question if being reconciled to

God actually does transform relationships with others, there was wide agreement, with Chinese speaking Christians responding with a strong 'yes' at 94 percent. But when asked if this transformation relates to racial division and ethnic tension we find the 'yes' response falling sharply to 65 percent. We then see the opposite movement among the Malay speaking Christians. This group recorded a relatively low 'yes' response (66 percent) and a high 'no' response (30 percent) to the more general question about whether reconciliation with God transforms our relationships with others. But Malay speaking Christians then recorded a higher 84 percent in agreeing that the Bible's teaching on reconciliation is applicable to the problems of racial division.

Denominationally, 87 percent of the SIB respondents agreed that the Bible's teaching on reconciliation could be applied to the problems of racial division and ethnic tension, and this positive response was followed closely by the Pentecostals at 84 percent. A lower 74 percent was recorded for both Methodist and Presbyterian participants, and 20 percent of the Methodists said they were not sure if the Bible's teaching on reconciliation could be applied to racial division and ethnic tension. Though to be fair, this statistic could mean that the Methodists believe the Bible has something to say about the topic of racial division and ethnic tension but that they are not sure exactly how, in practice, such teaching is to be applied.

For sure, an 80 percent agreement that the Bible's teaching on reconciliation can be applied to racial and ethnic issues is indeed significant, but yet there are differences in various categories that point to a more complex response.

Churches Contributing to National Unity

On whether or not Malaysian churches should contribute to the government's goal of national unity, a consistently high percentage of respondents from all language groups, from both East and West Malaysia, and across the denominational categories, said 'yes', churches should contribute to this goal.

Christians Co-operating with Other Faiths

A further area of high agreement comes with the issue of Christian co-operation with other faiths to work for peace and good race relations. A total of 87 percent answered 'yes' to this kind of co-operation. Both Chinese and Malay speaking Christians recorded a 'yes' response of 94 percent, with English speaking Christians at a reduced but still significant, 83 percent. Among the denominations, SIB respondents recorded the highest percentage in favour of co-operation, at 89 percent, while Pentecostals recorded the lowest, yet still a strong 'yes' in support of co-operation, at 79 percent.

Mission Among All Faith Communities

There is substantial agreement that churches in Malaysia should be involved in mission (including evangelism) to other faith communities. The overall percentage of 'yes' responses to this question is 88 percent, and this high response is reflected in both denominational and language categories. However, the following point brings us another perspective on this topic.

The Priority of Ethnic Harmony Over Cross-cultural Evangelism

Question 11: Consider this statement: "we should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society"

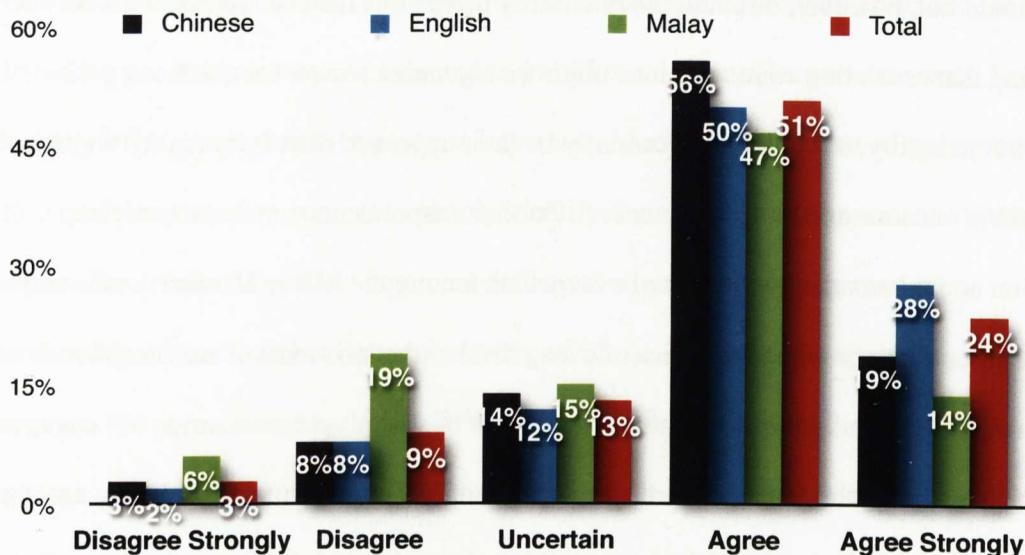


Figure 3.11 Survey question 11

There is high agreement that evangelism should not be carried out among other faith communities because it may heighten existing ethnic tensions. Survey participants were asked to consider the following statement: “We should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society.” This was a scaled question which provided a number of options: ‘agree strongly... agree... uncertain... disagree... disagree strongly’. The majority of respondents agreed with the statement that “we should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society”: 51 percent said they agreed and 24 percent agreed strongly. Although the overwhelming response to a previous question found that most Christians surveyed felt that mission should be carried out among people of other faiths, the response to question 11 qualifies that response. By asking for a specific response to a concrete situation, most respondents indicated that a concern about the possible escalation of ethnic tensions affects their views about the sharing of the gospel with people from other faiths.

We should not, however, discount the possibility that in this instance respondents may be agreeing that escalating ethnic tensions might be a genuine reason for not sharing their faith, but in reality, it would not necessarily be their approach (that is, in reality they would risk ethnic tensions and the consequences). Further, respondents may have read this question and automatically thought of evangelism among the Malay Muslim community. This is often the case when the topics of evangelism and ethnic tension are considered together. It is generally the case that most churches of various persuasions do not engage in evangelism among the Malay community because of laws prohibiting proselytism among Muslims in Malaysia, laws which state authorities have deemed necessary for the protection of the Muslim community and the preservation of wider ethnic harmony.³⁷³

Most Important Identity Markers

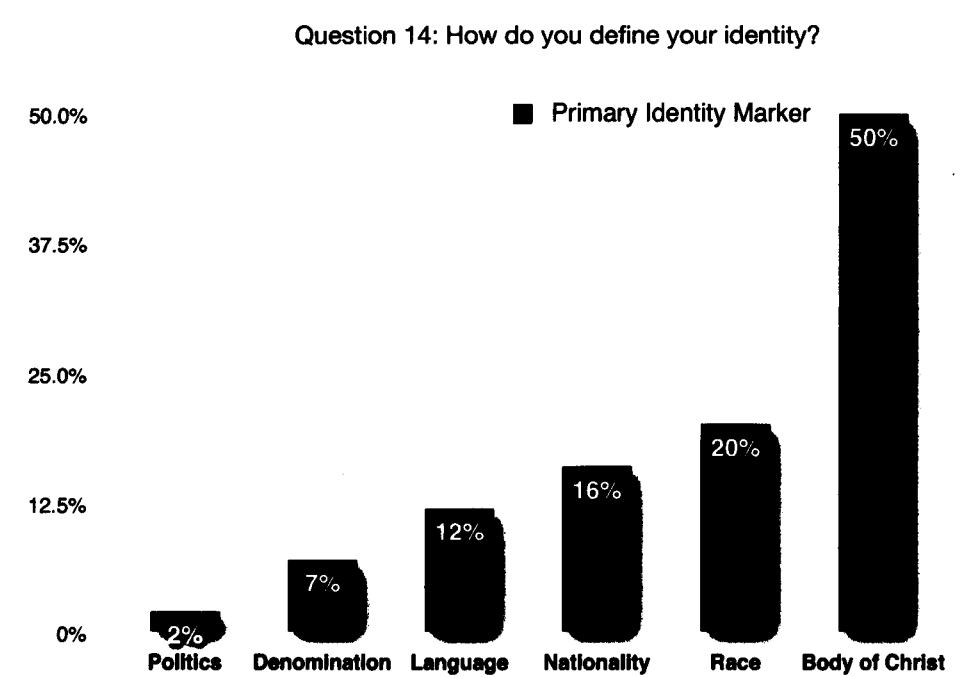


Figure 3.12 Survey question 14

³⁷³. See the brief discussion above on 'The Double Negative Conundrum' in the section 'Potential Limitations', page 145.

In the most complex question of the questionnaire respondents were asked to choose from a list of six possible identity markers and to put them in order of importance, with 1 being most important, through to 6 being least important. Many people did not complete the entire question and were content to simply identify their single most important identity marker. The results show that 50 percent defined their primary identity marker as membership of the Church as the global body of Christ. The next most popular categories were race (20 percent) and nationality³⁷⁴ (16 percent). From the perspective of the three language groups, only 9 percent of English speaking Christians said that language was most important, compared with 16 percent of Chinese and 20 percent of Malay speaking respondents. The 'race' category received a uniform response of 20 percent from the Chinese speakers, 19 percent from the English, and 23 percent from the Malay speaking Christians. This evenness of response is true of all other categories, including 'membership of the global Body of Christ': 49 percent, 51 percent, and 43 percent from respondents in Chinese, English and Malay language congregations respectively. There are no major differences recorded for this question along the denominational categories, apart from the response of the Pentecostal participants, 21 percent of whom chose 'nationality' as their most important identity marker (compared to 10 or 11 percent for the other denominations).

Congregations Should Aim to be Multiracial

There is clear agreement on the question of multiracial congregations. At 83 percent, the majority of Christians surveyed, across all language, geographical and denominational

³⁷⁴. In some countries respondents to a survey of this nature may not recognise a clear distinction between race and nationality. This is not the case in Malaysia where the term 'race' is used widely to refer to the main ethnic groups of Chinese, Indian, and Malay, and nationality refers to being Malaysian. Citizens in Malaysia can therefore be Malaysian Chinese, Malaysian Malay, or Malaysian Indian. Nationality (Malaysian) followed by racial identifier (Chinese, Indian, Malay) is the normal order of classification, though occasionally a Malaysian may describe themselves as a Chinese Malaysian, et cetera.

categories, agreed that congregations should be as multiracial as possible. The highest response came from English language churches, where 88 percent said 'yes'. The percentage of 'yes' responses was lowest among Chinese speaking congregations, at 73 percent. The four denominational blocks all registered an even response in favour of multiracial churches: Methodists at 82 percent, Pentecostals at 86 percent, Presbyterians at 81 percent, and the SIB at 85 percent.

The Application of Christian Faith to Issues Facing Society

Finally, most respondents (70 percent) agree that their local church helps them to apply their faith to the wider issues of society. Among the language groups, the Malay speaking respondents feel better equipped to apply their faith, with 79 percent choosing 'yes', followed by Chinese and English speaking Christians at 74 and 67 percent respectively. From the denominational perspective, 74 percent of SIB respondents feel their churches help them to apply their faith, while the lowest 'yes' response comes from the Pentecostals, of whom 65 percent said their church helps them apply their faith to societal issues.

Areas of Significant Disagreement and Difference

Ten areas have been identified that demonstrate broad levels of agreement across the key categories. However, upon closer analysis, we find four areas of significant disagreement and difference.

National Unity and Racial Integration

Question 8a: Is your church involved in any local initiatives that encourage national unity?

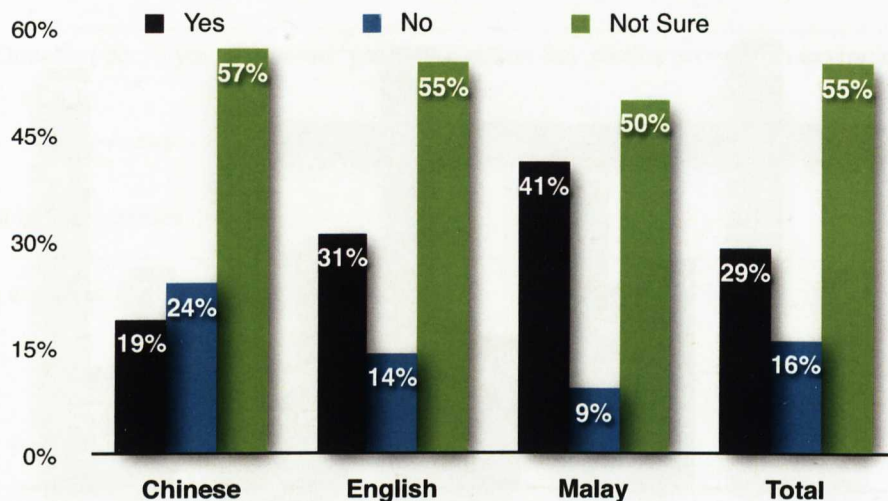


Figure 3.13 Survey question 8a by language group

As noted above, a high level of agreement was found in response to a question asking if Malaysian churches should contribute to the government’s goal of national unity.

However, later in the survey we find that very few of the respondents could say that their churches have actually been involved in local initiatives to encourage national unity.

Overall, only 29 percent said their churches were involved in such activities, with a substantial 55 percent choosing the ‘not sure’ option. Thirty-three percent of the SIB, 30 percent of the Pentecostal and 29 percent of the Methodist respondents said their churches are involved in initiatives that encourage national unity. This drops further to 20 percent among the Presbyterians.

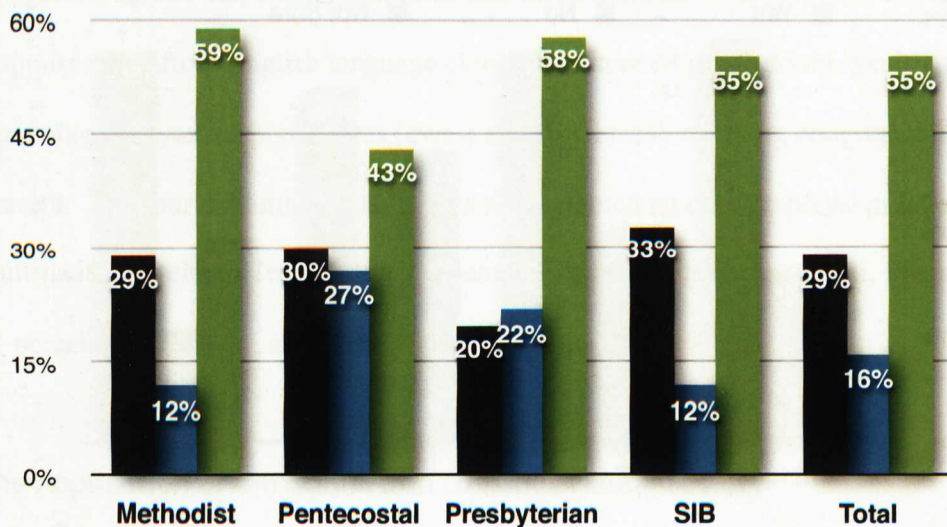


Figure 3.14 Survey question 8a by denominational group

The actual involvement of churches in national unity-type initiatives was further clarified when examples were requested. If a respondent answered ‘yes’ to the question asking if their church is involved in any local initiatives that encourage national unity, they were asked to provide an example. From the 884 respondents who answered the question, 125 separate examples were listed. Many of the examples were too vague for us to know how they actually worked in the context of a local community, and the brevity of the responses makes it difficult to identify evidence of a locally driven, ongoing initiative that is contributing to national unity. However, many examples do mention prayer for various aspects of national life, and most could vaguely be classified as examples of some form of social project to the wider community, presumably encompassing the main ethnic groups. The most commonly stated example is ‘community activities’, scoring an overall 20 percent, with the next highest being ‘prayer and fasting’ at 9 percent. The most striking statistic, however, is that in total, 55 percent of those who participated in the survey could not provide an example of their church being involved in a local initiative that promoted national unity and racial integration.

Question 8b: If you answered 'yes' (to question 8a) please provide an example

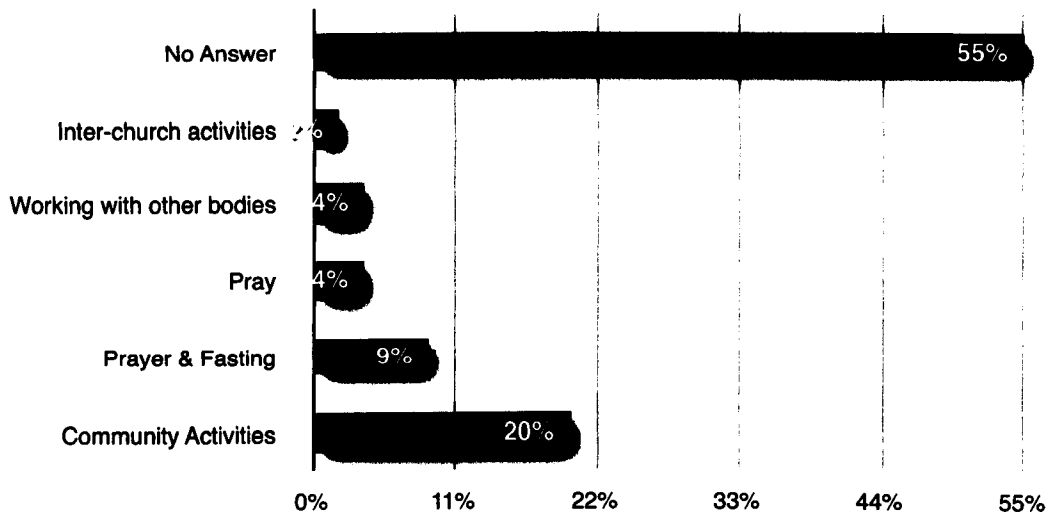


Figure 3.15 Survey question 8b

In addition, just 41 percent of respondents said 'yes', in believing that Malaysian churches have played an important role in society in terms of reconciliation and national unity. A further 40 percent said they were not sure, while 19 percent said 'no'. When we examine the language groups we find that a high 70 percent of Christians from Malay speaking churches agreed that Malaysian churches have been a driving force for national unity, compared to 43 percent of Chinese language churches and only 34 percent of English language congregations. Further, when we consider the responses in terms of age, we find that 62 percent of those over 65 believe churches have been active in promoting reconciliation and national unity. That percentage declines with each younger age group.³⁷⁵ Denominationally, while 47 percent of SIB Christians said Malaysian churches have been active in promoting national unity, only 26 percent of the Pentecostal participants felt the same way.

³⁷⁵. It is not uncommon to hear older non-Muslim Malaysians complain that race relations have deteriorated and that this has been brought about by a process of Islamisation - an intentional process at the heart of government policies since the 1980s.

Multiracial Churches

Question 13: Would you say your church congregation is multiracial?

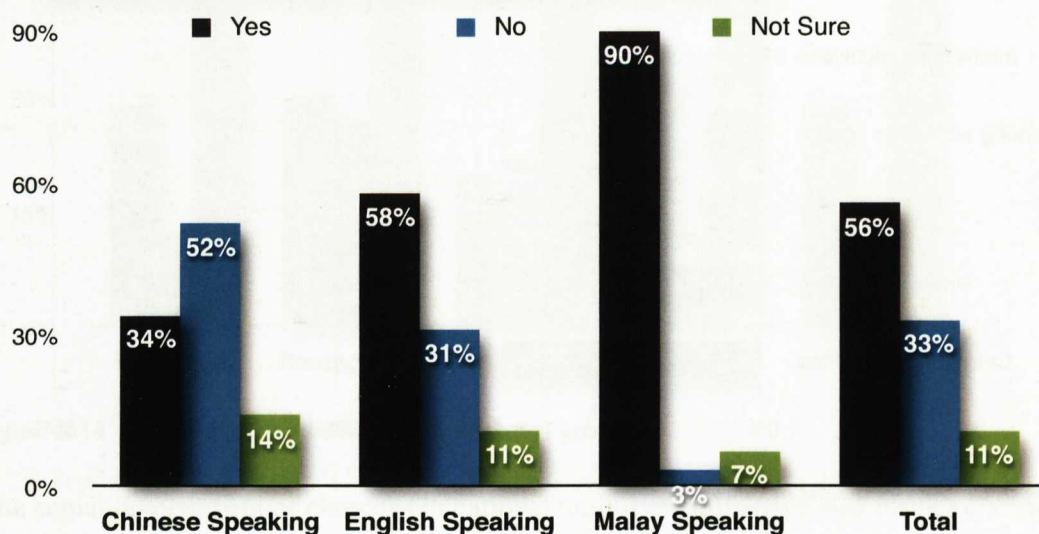


Figure 3.16 Survey question 13

Whilst the majority of respondents (83 percent) agreed that congregations in Malaysia should be as multiracial as possible, only 56 percent said their church congregation actually was multiracial, while 33 percent said theirs was not. When we examine the variable relating to language used in church, we find the 'yes' box ticked by 34 percent of Chinese speaking Christians, 58 percent of English speaking Christians, and a very high 90 percent of Malay speaking Christians. A possible reason for the high percentage among this third group is that Malay speaking congregations often comprise Christians from various indigenous groups.

The denominational responses to this question are revealing: 75 percent of SIB respondents viewed their congregation as multiracial, compared to just 25 percent of Presbyterians, 61 percent of whom said 'no', they did not consider their congregation to be multiracial. Fifty-one percent of the respondents from the largest mainline Protestant denomination, the Methodist Church, saw their congregation as multiracial.

Question 17: Do you think your local congregation is a model to the wider society of what a reconciled community should look like?

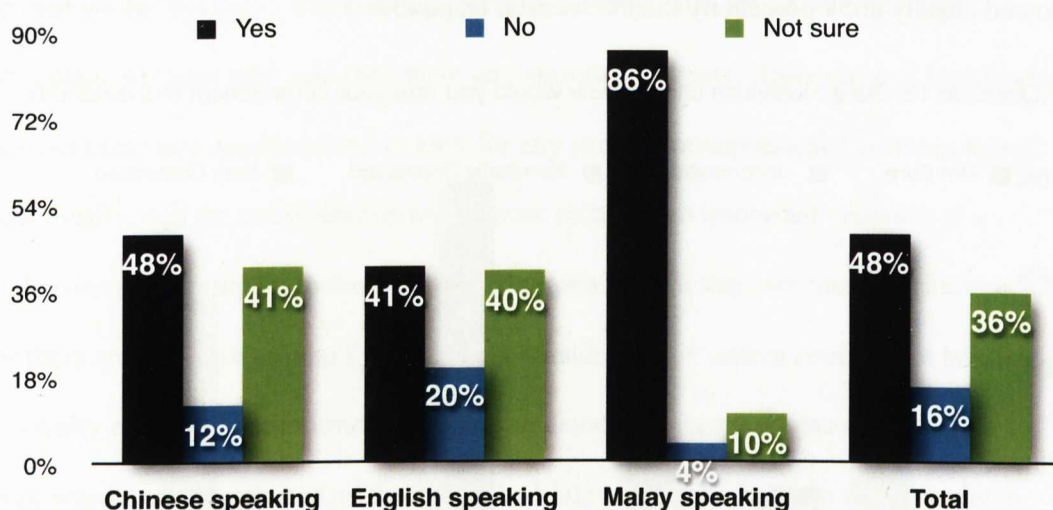


Figure 3.17 Survey question 17

Connected to the question of multiracial congregations is whether or not respondents view their own congregation as a model to the wider society of what a reconciled community looks like. Overall, a relatively low 48 percent consider their congregation to be such a model. In stark contrast, a confident 86 percent from the Malay speaking category said ‘yes’, their local congregation is a model to the wider society of a reconciled community. However, only 48 percent of Chinese speaking Christians and 41 percent of English speaking Christians feel the same way. Denominationally, 60 percent of SIB respondents see their congregations as reconciled communities, in contrast to 46 percent, 38 percent and 37 percent of Methodist, Pentecostal and Presbyterian respondents respectively.

Commitment to the Nation of Malaysia

An overall 52 percent of those surveyed rate themselves as uncommitted citizens. Nine percent are nominally committed, 16 percent very committed, and 23 percent are not sure. The highest uncommitted group, by language, are Chinese speaking Christians, at 62 percent, followed by English speaking Christians at 56 percent. Almost 70 percent of

Malay speaking Christians said they were not sure about their commitment to the nation. The findings show that Presbyterians, at 63 percent, are the most uncommitted group, followed closely at 59 percent by the Pentecostal respondents.

Question 15: As a Malaysian citizen, how would you rate your commitment to the nation?

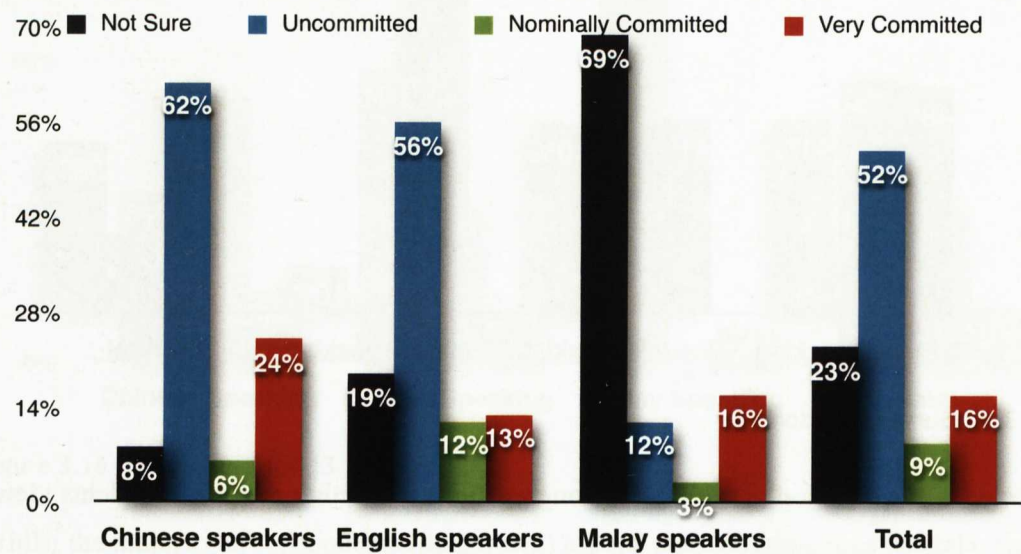


Figure 3.18 Survey question 15 by language group

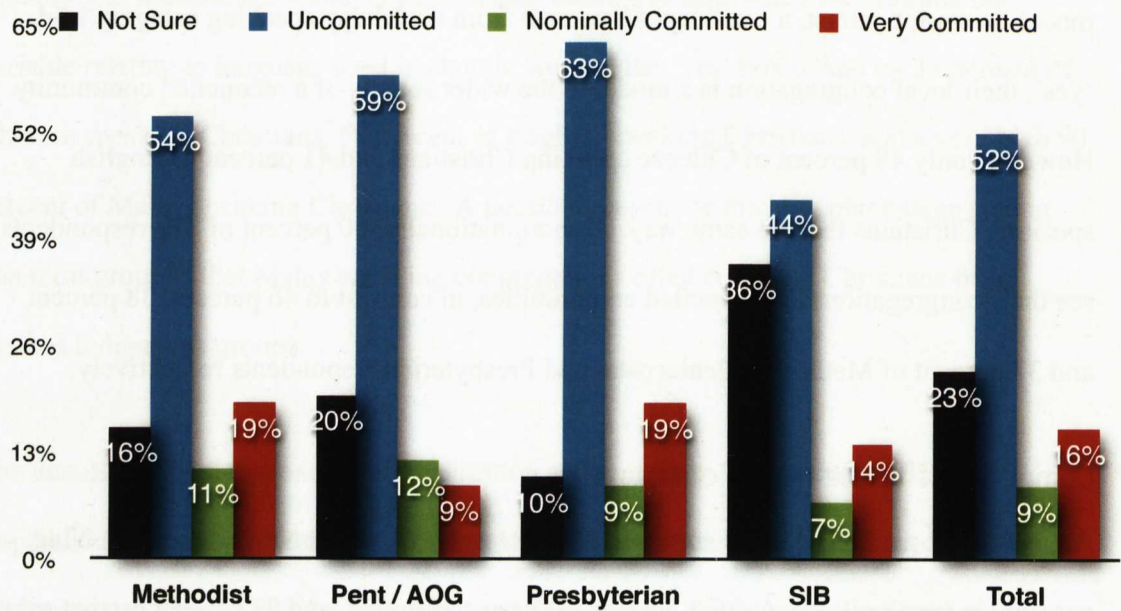


Figure 3.19 Survey question 15 by denomination group

When respondents were asked about emigrating to another country if they had the opportunity to do so, we find that 30 percent said 'yes', 38 percent said 'no', and 32 percent chose 'not sure'. These rather startling findings correspond with the high percentage of those who said they were uncommitted citizens. However, is it legitimate to connect these two questions and to look for any sort of correspondence between them? Specifically, can the consideration to emigrate be made an important criterion of a Malaysian's commitment to the nation of Malaysia? To be sure, we must be cautious here for there are Malaysians who live and work outside of their native country not because of disloyalty or lack of commitment to their homeland, but for other reasons such as employment or education. And there may be Malaysians who have no desire under any circumstances to emigrate, but who do not consider themselves to be committed citizens. However, over the past twenty-five years the topic of emigration, and specifically why so many Malaysian Christians tend to emigrate, has been discussed by various church leaders and Christian academics in various forums.³⁷⁶ Church leaders have noted a link between a sense of non-commitment to the nation of Malaysia and a desire to emigrate. Chapter two of this thesis has discussed reasons why Malaysian Chinese and Malaysian Indian Christians have felt marginalised by the Muslim majority government, and how affirmative action policies favouring *bumiputra* peoples have left many in the non-Muslim communities feeling like second-class citizens whose contribution to nation-building has not been properly recognised. It is because of this uniquely Malaysian set of challenges and circumstances, and in light of the previous debate on these issues, that these two questions have been included in the survey, and why we feel it is justified to imply that consideration to emigrate should be taken as one criterion for ascertaining commitment to the nation of Malaysia.

³⁷⁶ See the sub-section "Commitment to the Nation" in Chapter Four below.

Along the denominational spectrum we see no significant differences in response to this question, with only the Methodist respondents, at 32 percent, being marginally ahead of the others in saying they would consider emigrating to another country. The age category shows that the younger the respondent the more willing they are to consider emigrating.

Question 16: If you had the opportunity to do so, would you emigrate to another country?

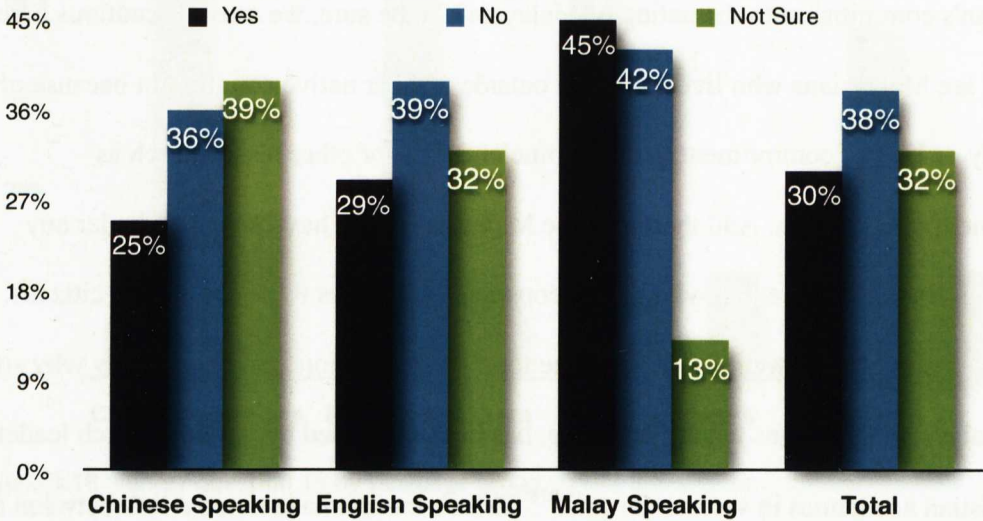


Figure 3.20 Survey question 16 by language group

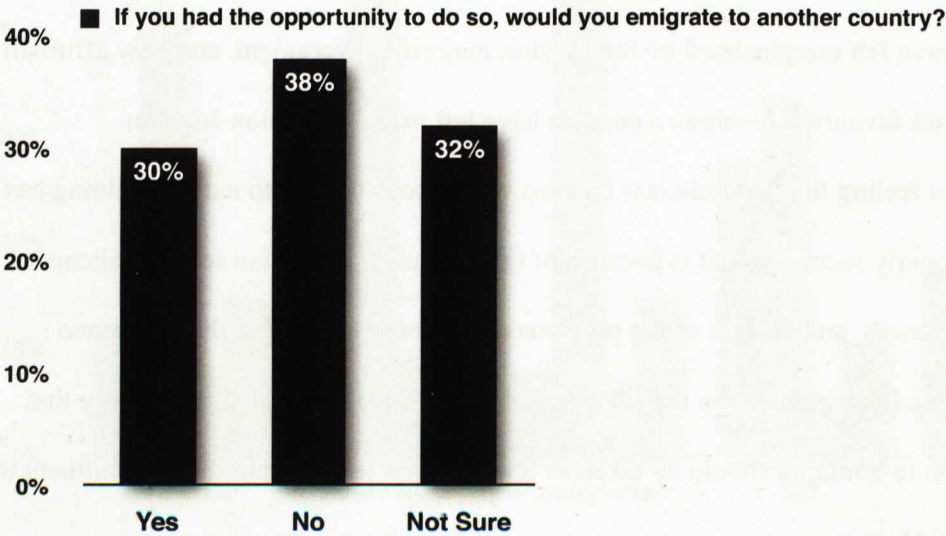


Figure 3.21 Survey question 16 by total response

Christian Involvement in Politics

Although there is a clear majority of 71 percent in favour of Malaysian Christians taking a more active role in politics, there are some differences among the language and geographical categories that should be noted. Among the three language groups only 43 percent of Malay speaking Christians said 'yes', compared to 69 percent of the Chinese and 77 per cent of the English speaking Christians. If we compare the responses of East and West Malaysia we find that while 75 percent of West Malaysians would like to see Christians more involved in politics, this figure drops to 66 percent among East Malaysians. Twenty percent of East Malaysians said 'no' to more political involvement, compared to 12 percent of West Malaysians. The difference here might be explained in some measure by the fact that in comparison to the situation in West Malaysia, East Malaysian Christians (particularly those from SIB churches) have had more experience of professing Christians becoming involved in the political arena, and are therefore more aware of the challenges and difficulties that such involvement entails.³⁷⁷ Among the denominations, there is uniform agreement in wanting to see more Malaysian Christians taking a more active role in politics.

Conclusion: So What?

Faced with such a significant amount of data the question must be asked: so what? It will be helpful to step back and consider briefly some of the larger themes that emerge and which point us forward to the discussion in chapter four. As we do so, two points should be made. Firstly, extrapolating points from a chapter full of statistics can come across as a rather stark exercise. It is important that we remember the socio-political background of

³⁷⁷. Sarawak and Sabah differ significantly from West Malaysian states in terms of religious make-up. According to the 2000 Census report, the populations of Sabah and Sarawak are 27.4 and 42.6 percent Christian respectively, and account for 70 percent of all Malaysian Christians.

chapter two which helps us understand why participants have responded in the ways they have. This is particularly relevant to the controversial questions about citizenship and commitment to the nation. Secondly, the findings of the survey show that key differences are highlighted when we examine the 'language used in church' categories. What really matters is the language the respondent uses; this is the category in which one can detect distinct worldviews being expressed.³⁷⁸ In comparison, geographical and denominational differences are not the key deciding factors, and in general, it is striking how similar the responses are along the denominational categories of Methodist, Pentecostal, Presbyterian and SIB. In answer to the question, *so what?* and with necessary caution, we therefore allow the spotlight to fall on three important themes arising from these findings.

The Relative Absence of Peacemaking Initiatives at the Local Church Level

The findings would indicate that in theory, respondents see reconciliation and peace-building as part of the mission of the Christian church. Participants agree that churches should be as multiracial as possible and that Malaysian churches have a role to play in Malaysia's quest towards unity and racial integration. However, the findings have identified a significant gap between belief and practice; between what respondents say they believe is important and what is actually happening 'on the ground' in terms of congregational involvement at the local level. For sure, such a gap could be identified in any group of respondents on almost any topic that one would care to research, and these results simply demonstrate that Christian communities are not immune to the profound

³⁷⁸ Louis Luzbetak has explained the general notion of world view in the following terms: "A world view represents the deepest questions one might ask about the world and life, and about the corresponding orientation that one should take toward them. More concretely, the world view provides answers to such basic questions as: Who or what am I? Why am I in the world? What is reality?" Luzbetak goes on to offer a threefold explanation of world view which is cognitive, emotional, and motivational. Louis J. Luzbetak, SVD, *The Church and Cultures: New Perspectives in Missiological Anthropology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1988), 252-253.

disconnect between belief and practice, between knowing and doing, that affects all humans.

Results suggest that the level of current involvement of Malaysian churches in peacemaking and reconciliation initiatives is low and sporadic. Only a small percentage said their churches were involved in local initiatives that encourage national unity and over half of all respondents believe their local church community is not a model to the wider society of what a reconciled community should look like. This may be an indication that within many churches there is inadequate teaching about reconciliation and its social implications. The relative absence of peacemaking initiatives at the local church level perhaps mirrors the fact that congregations themselves are not integrated communities. There is surely a link between what happens within the church and the effectiveness of the church's role in the wider community as far as peacemaking is concerned. Can the church sustain on the outside what it does not practice on the inside?

Limited Evidence of Bangsa Malaysia within the Church

The results of the survey give food for thought on the question of identity, specifically the concept of *bangsa Malaysia*, explained in chapter two. Possibly the most controversial and sensitive of all the questions were those relating to citizenship and emigration. The question on citizenship revealed that over fifty percent of respondents are uncommitted citizens, with almost a third indicating that they would emigrate to another country if they had the opportunity to do so. This raises a significant question mark over the loyalty of Malaysian Christians to their country. One implication of this is the absence of a vision of a shared future for all Malaysians. Any significant involvement in reconciliation initiatives in a divided society must surely presuppose such a vision. While the Malaysian government's well-oiled national unity machine promotes the idea of unity in a diverse

society, the call to embrace diversity has yet to be heard and acted upon within the churches surveyed.

The Sensitising of Malaysian Christians (through Islamisation) So That Their Practice of Mission May Have Been Diluted Through Fear of Causing Racial Disharmony.

Most of the Christians who took part in the survey indicated that Christian mission should include peacemaking and reconciliation, and that biblical teaching on reconciliation is applicable to the problems of racial division and ethnic tension. However, there is little evidence of any intentional focus on these aspects of Christian mission in any of the churches surveyed. Survey results show that respondents believe that Christian mission, including evangelism, should be carried out among all the faith communities in Malaysia, but at the same time respondents believe that evangelism should not be carried out if such activity runs the risk of escalating racial tensions. A number of respondents, while indicating that evangelism should be carried out among all the faith communities, wrote in the margins of their questionnaires that this of course did not include the Malay community because evangelising Malays was against the law. The results of the survey would suggest that among respondents there may be a lack of confidence in how the gospel can actually contribute to peace and reconciliation. The survey data may also be pointing to a tension that many feel exists between proclaiming the gospel and being peacemakers.

In chapter four we will explore in more depth some of the reasons why the current involvement of Malaysian evangelical Christians in peacemaking and reconciliation initiatives is low. To do so we shall explore seven themes already present in the questionnaire. We will examine these themes from theological and missiological perspectives, setting the findings of this chapter into a more academic context of

discussion. We shall also find these themes arising in the literature of Malaysian theologians, and engagement with these writers will be a subsidiary aim of chapter four.

Appendix

A SURVEY ON CHURCH & SOCIETY

As you know, ethnic relations continue to be a matter of concern to Christians in Malaysia. This survey aims to explore Christian attitudes to politics and reconciliation.

This is part of an academic research project being carried out by Peter Rowan, a member of OMF International, currently lecturing in Missiology at Malaysia Bible Seminari.

ALL REPLIES ARE ANONYMOUS.

Please tick one box only in each question:

1. Should Malaysian Christians be involved in social and community projects? (e.g. in education, health, and community relations) ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
2. Would you like to see Malaysian Christians taking a more active role in politics? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
3. Is it part of our Christian mission to work for peace and reconciliation in divided societies? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
4. Does being reconciled to God also transform our relationships with other people? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
5. Do you think the Bible's teaching about reconciliation can be applied to the problems of racial division and ethnic tension? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
6. Should Malaysian Christians cooperate with other faiths to work for peace and good race relations? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
7. Is the government's goal of national unity something Malaysian churches should contribute to? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
8. Is your church involved in any local initiatives that encourage national unity? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

If you answered YES, please provide an example:

9. Since Malaysia's independence, do you think Malaysian churches have been a driving force for reconciliation and national unity in society? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
10. Should Malaysian churches be involved in mission (including evangelism) to people of other faiths in Malaysia? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure
11. Consider this statement: "We should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society."
☐ agree strongly ☐ agree ☐ uncertain ☐ disagree ☐ disagree strongly
12. Should congregations in Malaysia be as multiracial as possible? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

13. Would you say that your church congregation is multiracial? ☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

14. How do you define your identity? **Please put in order of importance, 1= most important, through to 6 = least important** (do not use a number more than once):

☐ Language

☐ Race

☐ Church denomination

☐ Nationality

☐ Political viewpoint

☐ Membership of the Church as the global Body of Christ.

15. As a Malaysian citizen, how would you rate your commitment to the nation?

☐ very committed ☐ nominally committed ☐ uncommitted ☐ Not sure

16. If you had the opportunity to do so, would you emigrate to another country?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

17. Do you think your local congregation is a model to the wider society of what a reconciled community should look like?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

18. Does your local church help you apply your faith to issues facing society?

☐ Yes ☐ No ☐ Not sure

Thank you for your cooperation in completing this questionnaire. You may apply for a summary of the analysis of this survey from Peter Rowan in 2007.

Please indicate: ☐ Church member ☐ Minister / Pastor ☐ Theological educator ☐ Missionary ☐ Seminary student ☐ Elder / Deacon ☐ Other: _____

Church Denomination: _____

Predominant language used in church: ☐ Chinese ☐ English ☐ Malay ☐ Indian languages

Sex: ☐ Female ☐ Male

Age: ☐ Under 20 ☐ 20-34 ☐ 35-44 ☐ 45-54 ☐ 55-65 ☐ Over 65

Race / ethnic group: _____ State in Malaysia: _____

Chapter 4:

Key issues identified and explored in light of the findings of the survey questionnaire and as found in the works of Malaysian theologians

All theology is ultimately 'contextual,' that is it arises from a specific historical context and it addresses that context.³⁷⁹

This chapter takes its primary direction and structure from chapter three and aims to provide an exposition of seven key themes that have emerged from the survey questionnaire. There is more than one way of ordering these seven themes but as the chapter proceeds we will build towards the theme of identity.

Into this exposition we shall bring the writings of Malaysian theologians and church leaders. It is important to clarify how these works are being used and which theologians are being chosen. This will not be a systematic survey of Malaysians theologians. We are, rather, making use of the major voices who have addressed these themes and showing that the diagnosis we are making is relevant and current within the Malaysian theological context. There is a relatively small number of Malaysian theologians and we are therefore not limiting ourselves to a particular pool, but drawing on theologians from across the denominational spectrum. Significantly, when these works are quarried the reader discovers that the seven themes in question are very much to the fore. What follows, then, is the researcher's own assessment on what is needed in light of the discoveries of chapter three, but wherever the seven themes are found in the literature of Malaysian theologians we shall draw them in and use them to illuminate our discussion. In so doing we shall demonstrate that our seven themes, far from being irrelevant or imposed on the literature,

³⁷⁹. John Parratt, ed. *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 2.

are lively in the works of local theologians. At certain points the works of non-Malaysians will be used, but prominence will be given to those voices that best understand the context and missiological challenges facing the Malaysian churches.³⁸⁰

The following discussion and analysis proceeds on the basis that the findings of the survey questionnaire are a fair reflection of current views within evangelical communities in Malaysia.³⁸¹

Seven Key Themes for Missiological Reflection

1. An Integrative Theology of Mission that Includes Social Engagement and Peacebuilding

The Gap Between Words and Actions

The findings of chapter three suggest, at one level, that Malaysian evangelicals agree that being reconciled to God should also transform relationships with others and that Christian mission involves working for peace and reconciliation in divided societies. But they are not sure how. At the local church level, there is uncertainty about how these convictions should be worked out in concrete, practical ways. The answers to a number of the survey questions would suggest that there is an inadequate theological understanding of social

^{380.} The reasons behind the selection of themes contained in the survey questionnaire have been discussed in chapter three under 'Existing Questions and Previous Research'. The survey themes were gathered from the available literature, both Christian and non-Christian, and virtually all the themes feature prominently in the literature forming the basis of the socio-historical context of the church in Malaysia described in chapter two. Chapter two prompted the themes for chapter three's questionnaire, and the results of chapter three now direct the particular themes taken up in chapter four.

^{381.} No survey can provide a complete picture of whatever the focus of its research happens to be. There will always be limitations, and these will differ depending on one's perspective and area of interest. One may argue about this or that aspect of chapter three's survey results, but even if limitations are pointed out, the seven themes, we believe, are nevertheless worth pursuing.

engagement; that (contrary to the response to question 18: ‘Does your local church help you apply your faith to issues facing society?’) Malaysian churches are not necessarily places that are effective in equipping their members with the skills to translate theological belief into concrete action, leading to transformation.³⁸² The survey saw most of the respondents agree that their local church helped them apply their faith to the wider issues of society, and yet, most churches are not multiracial even though respondents agreed that they should be; few congregations are involved in local initiatives that promote national unity; almost 60 percent said ‘no’ or ‘not sure’ to whether their church had been a driving force for reconciliation and national unity since independence; and over half said they were uncommitted citizens of the country.

Explaining Inconsistencies

To help us make sense of this mixed picture we turn to the works of Ng Kam Weng and Hwa Yung - two of the best examples of Malaysian theologians who have written about

³⁸². We are not here pointing an accusing finger at Malaysian churches and somehow suggesting that this gap between words and actions is unique to them. The specifics and out-workings may differ but the problem, in some form or another, is universal among Christian individuals and communities. Our concern here is with the specifics of the Malaysian context.

Christian social concern in the Malaysian context.³⁸³ Ng describes the inconsistencies

typical of many Malaysian churches when it comes to social concern:

Sometimes, a church may launch into some form of social services³⁸⁴ for reasons of conscience. But no sooner have such steps been taken, nervousness sets in. Fears arise that these activities would dilute the Church's evangelical commitment. Its reputation will be tarred with the 'Social Gospel'. Whatever remnants of social concern is quickly abandoned in the event of any pressures (real or imagined) from the government. The result is one of halting and occasional incursions by the Church in the world. Such ineffectiveness underlines the difficulty of the church to be the salt and leaven for civil society. It is clear that our churches need to exercise a strong, determined and purposeful social responsibility that springs not from unstable impulses of piety, but from *a clear and comprehensive theological understanding of the mission of the Church*. Only then will the Gospel be seen as having a positive contribution to nation-building.³⁸⁵

In the same article, Ng summarises the main elements of the Report on Evangelism and Social Responsibility which emerged from the Lausanne consultation at Grand Rapids in 1982. In the above quotation Ng writes about forms of social services which Malaysian

³⁸³. Ng Kam Weng is a leader from the Evangelical Free Church in Malaysia and holds a Ph.D. in theology (Cambridge). Ng is the Director of the Kairos Research Centre which, according to the Centre's website, exists "to encourage and facilitate Christian research and scholarship on issues relevant to Malaysian Christianity" and "to contribute towards the intellectual development of Christian leaders and thinkers" (www.kairos-malaysia.org Accessed Friday, 15th June, 2007). Hwa Yung is currently the Methodist Bishop of Malaysia and former Principal of Seminari Teologi Malaysia. His D.Min. dissertation was published as *Mangoes or Bananas? The Quest for an Authentic Asian Christian Theology: Biblical Theology in an Asian Context*, (Oxford: Regnum Books International, 1997). Other examples could also be used: Denison Jayasooria - particularly his booklet, *Social Transformation: Theology and Action*, (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian CARE, 1990). Jayasooria has pioneered an urban development programme among Indian communities in West Malaysia. Sadayandy Batumalai is an ordained Anglican Minister who has also served as a theological educator in Malaysia. Many of his articles expound Kosuke Koyama's concept of neighbourology for the Malaysian context. His Ph.D., (Birmingham) was published in 1986 - *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourology: A Theology for Prophetic Living*, (Kuala Lumpur 1986). See Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Responses to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches*, Studia Missionalia Svecana XCVI (Lund, 2004), chapter 6, for introductions and analyses of several Malaysian theologians including Hwa Yung and Batumalai.

³⁸⁴. The distinction made by Lausanne in the Grand Rapids report between 'social services' and 'social action' is noted below in the following paragraph. In this quotation, and in the article it is taken from, Ng uses both terms interchangeably to talk about Christian social responsibility in all its dimensions. The article does discuss the Grand Rapids report and the relationship between evangelism and social concern but not the distinction between social services and social action. Lausanne Occasional Paper 21: *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 19-25, 1982. <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-21.html> (accessed Wednesday, 11th January, 2009).

³⁸⁵. Ng Kam Weng, "Spirit and Kingdom: Power and Manifestation in Mission," *Poimen* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia Bible Seminary, January-March, 1994), 20-21. Italics added.

churches may at times get involved in. Further on he writes about social action. The Lausanne report recognises that social concern manifests itself in different forms and that different vocabulary is used to describe various aspects of social responsibility.³⁸⁶ The Report distinguishes between two distinct forms: social services and social action. The former is largely focused on the individual and the family and is about the relieving of human need, philanthropic activity and works of mercy. The latter is concerned with the transformation of structures, with justice, and involves political and economic activity in removing the causes of human need. The extent to which individuals, and especially churches, may be involved in social action, has been a point of tension among Christians, and this was recognised at the Grand Rapids consultation. Ng does not define or differentiate between social services and social action, but speaks of the Malaysian church's social responsibility in terms that include not only social services (as defined by Lausanne) but also the involvement of Malaysian Christians and churches in the political processes concerned with nation building. Ng notes the Report's recommendation that while evangelism be assigned a priority over social action "there is no necessity for churches to choose between evangelism and social responsibility" and that a balance between the two should be sought. However, Ng believes that Malaysian "churches are faced with the possibility of imbalance."

We observe two divergent movements in our evangelical movement. One evangelical stream focuses on the spiritual renewal of the Holy Spirit, and with it, all the attending manifestation of charismatic gifts. The other evangelical stream focuses on social transformation as the outcome of the spreading of the Kingdom of God. While there are indeed individuals who cross both boundaries, nevertheless the tendency among the churches is to separate the Spirit and the Kingdom.³⁸⁷

³⁸⁶. See Lausanne Occasional Paper 21: *Evangelism and Social Responsibility: An Evangelical Commitment*. Grand Rapids, Michigan, June 19-25, 1982. <http://www.lausanne.org/all-documents/lop-21.html> (accessed Wednesday, 11th January, 2009).

³⁸⁷. Ng, "Spirit and Kingdom", 23.

Developing a Transforming Spirituality

Ng acknowledges how the “recovery of the charismatic dimensions of Christian spirituality has contributed much to the growth of the Church in Malaysia.” But it has encouraged a particular form of spirituality which focuses primarily on the inner transformation of individuals.³⁸⁸ This “diminished view of the Spirit” has resulted in “a truncated individualistic spirituality which offers only limited resources to guide churches in their mission of social transformation.”³⁸⁹ Without dismissing the value of charismatic renewal among Malaysian churches, Ng argues for a greater understanding of the missiological dimension of the work of the Spirit, and for the inseparability between Spirit and Kingdom: “The Spirit is the inner power of the Kingdom, and the Kingdom is the outward expression of the Spirit.”³⁹⁰ This, says Ng, will help the church develop a “transforming spirituality”³⁹¹ which will shape a spirituality of engagement and not withdrawal.

Developing a Sensitivity to the Social Context

A similar approach is found in the writings of Hwa Yung. Speaking of the need to recover a holistic gospel for the Asian context, he has this to say:

In our theological formulations, we need to reclaim “kingdom” categories... We need, therefore, to reconceptualize or, at least, reemphasize mission as the proclamation of Jesus’ lordship over all of life - individuals, as well as whole communities; in every sphere of human life, be it spiritual, psychological, socioeconomic or ecological; and both now and in the world to come!³⁹²

³⁸⁸. Ibid, 23.

³⁸⁹. Ibid, 25.

³⁹⁰. Ibid, 31.

³⁹¹. Ng Kam Weng, *Bridge-Building in a Pluralist Society: a Christian Contribution* (PJ: Pustaka SUFES, 1994), 38-40.

³⁹². Hwa Yung, “Strategic Issues in Missions - An Asian Perspective”, *Evangelical Missions Quarterly* (January, 2004), 31.

But the writings of Malaysian theologians also give attention to the social context:

“theology needs to be informed by a sociological reading of the social context if it is to develop a situationally sensitive strategy of social action.”³⁹³ This situational sensitivity will mean a realistic assessment of the church’s role in the wider society. Ng notes that most of the theological literature available to Malaysians on the topic of social action “assumes a situation in which Christians are at least nominally in the majority.” In other words, most of the literature comes from Western contexts:

It is granted that the present situation in the West is far from one in which Christians are exercising direct political power such as in Calvin’s Geneva. Christians in Malaysia find themselves in an even more difficult situation. The possibility of direct Christian influence in the political process is minimal. Any attempt from the Christian community to reform the socio-political will at best be ignored. A worse reaction which is not unlikely, is hostility from the governing power, leading to political and religious suppression. In our different situation, any uncritical parroting of Western Christian proposals on social action amounts to naive triumphalism which will be swept away by hostilities from the ruling powers in the event of ‘provocation’ by Christian social action.³⁹⁴

Churches as ‘Contrast Communities’

Practical considerations must inform strategies for Christian action in Malaysia. If, under the present circumstances, Christian influence in the socio-political realm is impossible, that does not mean churches should retreat from their social responsibility. Significant influence in the wider community can be achieved if local churches become ‘contrast

³⁹³. Ng, “Spirit and Kingdom”, 27.

³⁹⁴. Ibid, 28.

communities'.³⁹⁵ This concentration on building a quality of community life in the local church context is, in Ng's words, "a temporary step for strategic long term results":

Under such a strategic move, the Church maintains its social services to alleviate human needs even though its social action to change power structures - is granted a subsidiary place in the social responsibility of the church. The energy is then concentrated on building a Christian community which increasingly manifest the values of the Kingdom so that it becomes a more attractive alternative to the dominant life in society.³⁹⁶

Some may argue that concentrating on the life of the local church should not be seen simply as a temporary strategic step but rather, a core activity for the Christian community wherever it finds itself and in whatever circumstances. Ng elaborates his point by gathering support from John Yoder and J. C. Bennett who see the church as "a base for operation in the world that is still alien... an ethical laboratory... to push further in the realisation of Christian goals for human life than can be done in society at large... a school to train for dual citizenship... and a voice of criticism that continues to sound when most other voices have been shattered."³⁹⁷

Contextual Theology

If theology is to be "informed by a sociological reading of the social context" and "to develop a situationally sensitive strategy of social action", this will mean giving greater emphasis to the developing of contextual theology. Stephen B. Bevans defines this

as a way of doing theology in which one takes into account: the spirit and message of the gospel; the tradition of the Christian people; the culture in which one is

³⁹⁵. Many church communities in Asia view themselves as beleaguered communities. For various reasons they feel threatened and find it easier to withdraw from meaningful social engagement. Vinay Samuel refers to churches as "communities of resistance" who can have a positive impact for the Kingdom of God disproportionate to their size and much more effectively than the individual Christian. See Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden, "Business and Corruption," in *Anglican Life and Witness: a Reader for the Lambeth Conference of Anglican Bishops 1998*, ed. Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (London: SPCK, 1997), 121.

³⁹⁶. Ng, "Spirit and Kingdom: Power and Manifestation in Mission," (1994), 29.

³⁹⁷. John Howard Yoder, *The Priestly Kingdom: Social Ethics as Gospel*, (University of Notre Dame Press, 1985) 90, quoted in Ng Kam Weng, (1994), 34.

theologising; and social change in that culture, whether brought about by western technological process or the grass-roots struggle for equality, justice, and liberation.³⁹⁸

It is widely accepted today that all theology is contextual and the task of theologising involves not only acknowledging the context but responding to it. But in some places there has been the notion that contextual theology is for majority world, rather than western locations. Christopher Wright believes that at times the use of the term 'contextual theologies' has betrayed

the arrogant ethnocentricity of the West, for the assumption was that other places are contexts and they do their theology for those contexts; we, of course, have the real thing, the objective, contextless theology. This assumption is being rightly challenged, and the West is seen for what it is - a particular context of human culture, not necessarily any better or any worse than any other context for reading the Bible and doing theology.³⁹⁹

Wright may be guilty of overstatement here.⁴⁰⁰ For sure, given centuries of theological reflection in the West, and with such reflection having then been exported to virtually all parts of the globe, Western expressions of theology have, until the latter half of the twentieth century, tended to dominate.⁴⁰¹ Wright does go on to say that we need to be wary of an unhelpful pendulum swing in reacting against every expression of Western theology. With the growth of the global church there are now many more interpretative communities reading the Bible and theologising, and those communities in non-Western contexts are joining their voices to those in the West. In this way the historic Western theological categories are being expanded. But this task of 'globalising theology' begins with each

³⁹⁸. Stephen B. Bevans, *Models of Contextual Theology* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2002), 1.

³⁹⁹. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove: IVP, 2006), 42.

⁴⁰⁰. There will always be exceptions, but writers such as Lesslie Newbigin, Wilbert Shenk and Kevin Vanhoozer do refer to the West as a context in which theology must be appropriately contextualised.

⁴⁰¹. On the growth of non-Western theologies see Philip Jenkins, *The New Faces of Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 2006; Lamin Sanneh, *Whose Religion is Christianity? The Gospel Beyond the West* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2003).

interpretative community engaging in the work of theologising in its own local context.

"The way forward" writes Vanhoozer, "is not non-Western but *more-than-Western* theology."⁴⁰² Scholars such as Lesslie Newbigin have long reminded theologians that the West is a mission field like anywhere else and therefore a context in which theology must continue to be done both faithfully and relevantly. Having returned from missionary service in India in the 1970s, Newbigin began to engage with his home context of Britain: "From this point on Newbigin was not only engaging a particular context but was continually asking the question of strategy: how can the church respond faithfully in this situation?"⁴⁰³ For Bevans, contextual theology - "is really a theological imperative... contextualisation is part of the very nature of theology itself" and therefore is as much needed in the West as it is in places such as Malaysia.⁴⁰⁴

In many ways, the Malaysian churches continue to be shaped by Western influences. The following assessment of Sadayandy Batumalai, over twenty years ago, remains largely true of today's churches in Malaysia:

After 30 years of independence, the Malaysian Church in general mainly remains a 'potted plant' with very little change in its general communication system, vehicle of worship, prayer, evangelism, and theological training programmes. For further progress, we need to identify various obstacles and remove them in the best possible way, in order to present a Malaysian image, and yet at the same time

⁴⁰². Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?" in *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity*, eds Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006), 119.

⁴⁰³. Wilbert R. Shenk, "Lesslie Newbigin's Contribution to Mission Theology," *International Bulletin of Missionary Research* Vol. 24, issue 2 (April, 2000): 63.

⁴⁰⁴. We note that contextual theology is not pursued in isolation from the wider global context. Doing local theology should serve the global context. As Vanhoozer puts it, "Doing theology in an era of world Christianity ultimately means taking part in a worldwide conversation about how best to understand... the biblical text... No one interpretative community can mine all the treasures of the Word of God by itself. If biblical interpretation is indeed the soul of theology, then theologians had better attend to the global conversation." Vanhoozer welcomes what he sees as "a new appreciation for context" resulting "in a more vital and practical interpretation of Scripture in which understanding is a matter of loving as well as knowing God with all one's heart, mind, and strength." Kevin Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?", 116, 122, 93.

Christian Contribution to Nation Building and Transforming Society

Given the Islamic context of Malaysia and how Islam itself professes to be a total way of life, any contextual Christian theology must be equally comprehensive. Christian mission in such an Islamic context must "be informed by a comprehensive mission agenda",⁴⁰⁶ an agenda which, for Ng and Hwa, as well as for others who tend to operate broadly within the "missiology from the periphery" paradigm, includes contributing to the task of nation building. Ng in particular gives attention to the question "in what way is the church to present a prophetic witness to authorities?"⁴⁰⁷ In the Islamic context of Malaysia Ng is all too aware that the Christian community may be tempted to withdraw rather than to engage. In his writing he underlines how the church is called to be an agent of transformation. His articles are aimed at challenging Malaysian Christians to develop a coherent Christian social vision for their context. To do this Ng not only utilises the insights of writers such as Yoder, but draws on reformed models such as 'covenant politics' and 'sphere sovereignty'.⁴⁰⁸ For Ng, 'covenant' is a "fundamental category that has helped Christians

⁴⁰⁵. Sadyandy Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourhood: a Theology for Prophetic Living* (Kuala Lumpur: Batumalai, 1986), 154.

⁴⁰⁶. Ng Kam Weng, "Creating Social Space for Mission," *Transformation*, 20/4 October, 2003:224.

⁴⁰⁷. Ng Kam Weng, "A Christian Social Vision for Nation Building," *Understanding the Modern World through Christian Eyes*, Kairos Research Centre (September, 2007), 27.

⁴⁰⁸. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to provide a comprehensive exposition of what is meant by 'sphere sovereignty'. Briefly, sphere sovereignty is a social-theological model developed by Abraham Kuyper (1837-1920), a model shaped in no small way by Kuyper's reflections on John Calvin. Herman Dooyeweerd tells us that the phrase 'sphere sovereignty' originated with Kuyper. Christian social activists have drawn from this model because it views all aspects of life - politics, the state, the church, the family, the business and academic worlds, as separate yet interconnected spheres of human life and activity, all of which are under the sovereign lordship and rule of Christ. Ng draws from Herman Dooyeweerd's work on sphere sovereignty, particularly *Roots of Western Culture* (Toronto: Wedge Publishing Foundation, 1979), but see also *A New Critique of Theoretical Thought*, 4 volumes (1953-1958) and *A Christian Theory of Social Institutions* (1986). Ng writes: "The idea is that God has built into each sphere of society its own integral laws of operations. The corollary is the distribution of authority over various centres of life. The outcome is a safeguard against any one sphere

devise a comprehensive framework for political engagement” because it “balances freedom and community solidarity... allows for diversity in unity” and “fosters moral realism.”⁴⁰⁹ The task of nurturing the covenant community must have priority because the quality and character of the Christian community matters for its mission of transforming the society around it. The Christian community in Malaysia, as in other parts of Asia, may be small, and with no real hope of obtaining substantial political power for a very long time. But if the Christian community embodies “the life of a transformed community” it can have an influence disproportionate to its size.

As such, the covenant way of life, characterised by justice and integrity, emphasises mutual accountability in the presence of a transcendental authority. The hope of peace and justice, in a world rent by tragic conflicts, must therefore be exemplified by the local and national churches of Asia. The covenant community may be small, but it can act as a catalyst for social renewal.⁴¹⁰

These covenant communities are agents of transformation, signs of the gospel, communities of renewal, of resistance, and of reconciliation:

Because of the reconciling work of Christ, relationships in the community should transcend all social and ethnic barriers (Galatians 3:28). This ruling does not imply the abolition of legal and social structures. Instead, their functions were redirected towards the building of a covenant community... The Covenant community allows diversity of cultural roles and celebrates pluralism... The remarkable role of the covenant community lies precisely in its ability to attract and integrate socially marginalised groups and the underprivileged of society... Believers are to strengthen their communal identity and through their caring relationships testify to an alternative society.⁴¹¹

usurping authority over other spheres of operations. It is important through to stress that a theistic view of life is necessary to avoid either the elevation of any one sphere into idolatrous significance or to prevent a fragmentation of life and polarisation of society. The unity of social life and the diversity of community are ensured.” Ng Kam Weng, *The Quest for Covenant Community and Pluralist Democracy in an Islamic Context* (Singapore: Trinity Theological College, 2008), 21-22.

⁴⁰⁹. Ng Kam Weng, “A Christian Social Vision”, 28.

⁴¹⁰. Ng Kam Weng, “Covenant Politics and Pluralist Democracy for a New Asia: An Asian Christian Social Vision,” *Transformation* 21 no. 2 (April, 2004): 89.

⁴¹¹. Ng Kam Weng, “Covenantal Politics” (2004), 90-91. Ng’s writing here contains echoes of Vinay Samuel who also writes extensively of the covenant community as an agent of transformation. Samuel’s theology of mission is well summarised by Chris Sugden in *Seeking the Asian Face of Jesus* (Oxford: Regnum, 1997) chapters 5-9, and in *Gospel Culture and Transformation* (Oxford: Regnum, 2000).

Malaysian theologians, such as Ng and Hwa, seek to promote a holistic theology of mission by engaging with the Pentecostal-Charismatic emphasis which has influenced Christian spirituality in Malaysian churches.⁴¹² In their respective writings they provide critical evaluation of the Pentecostal-Charismatic influence, and seek to re-connect those elements they believe have become disjointed because of an unbalanced spirituality. Their concern is with the relationship between the person and work of the Holy Spirit, the Kingdom of God, and the mission of God, and to articulate a spirituality which leads to greater missional engagement.

An appreciation of the cosmic work of the Holy Spirit is crucial, as is the role of the Spirit in the mission of God. However, in a Muslim-majority country where the vast majority of those who profess to be Muslim have little understanding of the Christian doctrine of the Trinity, might it not be more important for Malaysian Christians to have a trinitarian foundation to their spirituality? Would a better understanding of the fullness of the triune God not lead towards a greater expression of the fullness of the biblical mission?⁴¹³ A substantial study on the doctrine of the Trinity for the Malaysian context has been provided by the Malaysian Indian theologian, Albert Walters.⁴¹⁴ Whilst the focus of Walters' book is

⁴¹². Anderson, Allan and Edmond Tang, eds. *Asian and Pentecostal: The Charismatic Face of Christianity in Asia* (Oxford: Regnum Books, 2005).

⁴¹³. One could argue that trinitarian foundations for spirituality and mission are surely necessary for Christian communities in all contexts. But there is an extra dimension to the urgency for such foundations in Islamic contexts where confusion exists among Muslims about what exactly Christians believe when they talk about the Trinity. Elsewhere in East Asia, though in a totally different cultural context, it is worth noting the contribution of Nozomu Miyahira in the area of trinitarian theology. In *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God*, Miyahira wrestles with why Christianity has not become sufficiently rooted in Japan. His answer is a reconstruction of the doctrine of the Trinity for the Japanese context using terms familiar to the Japanese mindset, namely 'betweenness' and 'concord'. See *Towards a Theology of the Concord of God: A Japanese Perspective on the Trinity* Paternoster Biblical and Theological Monographs (Carlisle: Paternoster Press, 2000).

⁴¹⁴. Albert Sundararaj Walters, *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002). See also his *Knowing Our Neighbour: A Study of Islam for Christians in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Council of Churches of Malaysia, 2007).

primarily Christian-Muslim relations, there are aspects of his work that relate to the broader mission of the church in Malaysia, and these will be noted in a later section.

It is beyond the scope of this thesis to explore the vast domain of the theology of mission, but it would seem timely at this point to be reminded of Lesslie Newbigin's *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission*,⁴¹⁵ in which mission takes its shape and priorities from the triune-God of the Bible. More recently, Christopher Wright has emphasised "how important it is to ground our theology of mission (and our practice of it) in the mission of God and in our worshipping response to all that God is and does. From that perspective, we are advocates of God before we are advocates for others."⁴¹⁶

2. Multiracial Congregations

The doctrine of the Trinity also engages us on the question of community, a theme very much to the fore in Matthew's Gospel, which has much to say about the relational aspect of discipleship and the community of the church. In the Great Commission, baptism is to be "in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit" (Matthew 28:19).⁴¹⁷ To be baptised "in the name" is to be baptised into the being and person of the triune God of the Bible, into the community of the Godhead. It is also to be brought into a community which is called to be

⁴¹⁵. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Doctrine for Today's Mission* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh House Press, 1963; Carlisle, U.K.: Paternoster, 1998).

⁴¹⁶. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative* (Downer's Grove: IVP, 2006), 45.

⁴¹⁷. The trinitarian baptismal formula of Matthew 28:19 is unique to Matthew's Gospel. Some scholars doubt its Matthean authenticity and also whether the passage actually contains Jesus' *ipsissima verba*. There is little doubt, however, as to the very early usage of a trinitarian baptismal formula in the early church. Donald A. Hagner provides helpful commentary on the verse in *Word Biblical Commentary: Matthew 14-28* (Dallas: Word Books, 1995), 887-888, as does D. A. Carson in a slightly more detailed treatment in "Matthew" in *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1984), 598.

the dynamic expression of the character of God: Father, Son and Holy Spirit. It is a family transcending biological families, sharing one heavenly Father. It is a redeemed community, sharing salvation from sin and judgement through the one and only Saviour, Jesus Christ. It is an organic community, brought into being and continuously being sustained by the Holy Spirit. Those within this community are to live out the new way of life into which they have been initiated, so that those outside may look on and see who the true and living God is...⁴¹⁸

How then might Christian congregations adequately reflect the community within the Godhead? Beattie has pointed out that evangelicals in Asia emphasise the need to express Christian identity in terms of community. This leads us to consider what distinctive form church communities might take in Malaysia in order for them to be prophetic and parable-like⁴¹⁹ to the wider community? One answer lies in expressing the way Christian identity transcends ethnic and cultural boundaries in multiracial congregations.

While 83 percent of respondents to the survey questionnaire said that Malaysian congregations should be as multiracial as possible, a much lower percentage of 56, said their church congregation was, in their view, multiracial. But why should 83 percent of those surveyed feel that Malaysian congregations should be multiracial? One answer may be found in returning to the theme of integration. Since Malaysia's independence, many have pinned their hopes on the education system to provide the necessary foundations for racial integration, and on the local school as a place where such integration can be fostered and seen in action, preparing each generation for the reality of *bangsa Malaysia*.⁴²⁰

However, recent research has shown that in this aspect at least, the education system may

⁴¹⁸. Rose Dowsett, *The Great Commission Thinking Clearly Series* (London: Monarch, 2001), 24.

⁴¹⁹. See Kevin Vanhoozer in *The Futures of Evangelicalism* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 92-93. Vanhoozer speaks of the church as "a parable of the kingdom": "As in Jesus' parables, the church should be a picture of 'the extraordinary in the ordinary', a model of love that surpasses the mundane economies of give and take." (2003), 92.

⁴²⁰. The goal of National Unity gave birth to the phrase *Bangsa Malaysia*, first used by the former Malaysian Prime Minister, Mahathir Mohammad in 1991. 'Bangsa' is a Malay word meaning 'race, nationality; belonging to a race, or nationality'. *Bangsa Malaysia* means "Malaysian nationality", "Malaysian People" or "United Malaysian People".

have failed.⁴²¹ Of course, it continues to be a goal that schools pursue; children need contexts in which they learn to interact with their peers from other ethnic groups and to appreciate from an early age the diversity of Malaysia's multicultural life. Research has shown that people who have experienced significant "prior interracial contact in schools and neighbourhoods [are] more likely, as adults, to have more racially diverse general social groups and friendship circles."⁴²² But since schools (and neighbourhoods) provide only superficial rather than significant prior contact, the question is asked: where can the latter occur and where can a racially reconciled community be seen in action, in Malaysia? One answer is the local church. The 83 percent who responded to the survey saying they felt congregations should be multiracial may consider their local congregations to have the potential to function as models to the wider society of what reconciled communities look like and that such congregations demonstrate an important implication of the gospel.

Racial Barriers Within Christian Churches

In reality most congregations are as racially segregated as the society around them, including, as the following quotation points out, the governing coalition party in Malaysia - the Barisan National. Denison Jayasooria, an Indian Malaysian who co-ordinates social projects among poorer Indian communities in Malaysia has called for the breaking down of racial barriers within the Christian community:

While it is true to affirm the importance of an individual's or community's cultural, linguistic or racial background, those who have found new life in Jesus are a radical community... Within our Malaysian context where there is racial and linguistic polarisation, the Christian community should set a model of inter-ethnic relations. However the tragic reality is, many large denominations operate like the Barisan Nasional. As a radical step forward, should not our churches drop labels like

⁴²¹. See Lee Hock Guan, "Globalisation and Ethnic Integration in Malaysian Education" in *Malaysia: Recent Trends and Challenges* ed. Saw Swee-Hock and K. Kesavapany (Singapore: Institute of South East Asian Studies, 2006), 230-259.

⁴²². Michael O. Emerson, Rachel Tolbert Kimbro, George Yancey. "Contact Theory Extended: The Effects of Prior Racial Contact on Current Social Ties" *Social Science Quarterly* Vol. 83 Issue 3 (September 2002), 745.

Churches as Communities of Reconciliation

For Jayasooria, the gospel transcends the barriers of race, ethnicity and culture, making the church the most inclusive community on earth. In its local expression it therefore has the potential to become a community of hope in a fragmented world. In Malaysia, the church has the task of not only proclaiming the message of reconciliation to all Malaysians, but of embodying the concrete implications of that message in its community life, so that Malaysians of all races can look at a local church community and see the gospel fleshed out in a racially reconciled group of people who can work, worship and witness together. Such a model of reconciliation will find various pathways opening up for it to work for reconciliation in the wider community. Richard Dorall, a Malaysian academic in University Malaya and with past involvement in the Christian Federation of Malaysia, recognises the unique, multiethnic make-up of the church in Malaysia:

The most striking feature of Malaysia's non-Christian religions is their ethnic exclusivity. Only Christianity is multiethnic, reflecting closely in its membership the overall ethnic composition of Malaysia... Christianity, then, is uniquely placed to make major contributions to genuine multiracial living in Malaysia.⁴²⁴

Church Planting Strategies that Hinder Integration

Alongside perspectives such as those from Dorall and Jayasooria, the Church Growth emphasis on mission as church planting among people-groups remains persuasive among Evangelicals in Malaysia.⁴²⁵ But such an approach works counter to the visible unity that

⁴²³. Denison Jayasooria, *Social Transformation: Theology and Action* (Kuala Lumpur: Malaysia Care, 1990).

⁴²⁴. Richard F. Dorall, "Religion and Ethnicity in Malaysia: A Preliminary Analysis of Data in the 1980 Population and Housing Census of Malaysia" (Kuala Lumpur, n.d.). [unpublished].

⁴²⁵. See Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Responses to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches*, Studia Missionalia Svecana xcvi, (Uppsala: Lund, 2004), for a brief summary of

Dorall and Jayasooria and others say Christian churches need to demonstrate in Malaysia.

This particular church-planting approach has been criticised by the Sri Lankan

missiologist, Vinoth Ramachandra:

The moment we make 'planting churches within people groups' the aim of Christian mission, even in heterogeneous geographical areas, we inevitably distort the gospel so that it no longer confronts the idolatries of politics and culture. It no longer challenges converts to identify with the 'outsider' and even the 'enemy'.⁴²⁶

Ramachandra includes the example of David Bosch to illustrate the uniqueness of the

Church in how it transcends all differences. We follow Ramachandra in quoting Bosch at

length, remembering that Bosch's own context was that of South African apartheid:

Paul could never cease to marvel at this new thing that had caught him unawares, as something totally unexpected: the Church is one, indivisible, and it transcends all differences. The sociologically impossible... is theologically possible... All this most certainly does not mean that culture is not to play any role in the Church and that cultural differences should not be accommodated... However, cultural diversity should in no way militate against the unity of the Church. Such diversity in fact should serve the unity. It thus belongs to the well-being of the Church, whereas the unity is part of its being. To play the one off against the other is to miss the entire point. Unity and socio-cultural diversity belong to different orders. Unity can be confessed. Not so diversity. To elevate cultural diversity to the level of an article of faith is to give culture a positive theological weight which easily makes it into a revelation principle.⁴²⁷

The father of the Church Growth theory of mission, Donald McGavran, observed that

"men like to become Christians without crossing racial, linguistic or class barriers."⁴²⁸ For

McGavran, evangelism and church planting should have priority in the mission of the

church. The Church Growth theory of mission has promoted not only the people-group

strategy in mission thinking but also the prior assumption that churches should be planted

among homogeneous, culturally specific groups, because a person should be able to hear

Church Growth thinking and its influence in Malaysian church circles.

⁴²⁶. Vinoth Ramachandra in *The Message of Mission*, Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 204.

⁴²⁷. David Bosch, "Church Unity Amidst Cultural Diversity," *Missionalia* (April, 1982), reprinted in *Evangelical Review of Theology* 8.2 (October 1984): 252-253, and cited in Peskett and Ramachandra, (2003), 204.

⁴²⁸. Donald McGavran, *Understanding Church Growth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970), 198.

the gospel without having to cross a cultural or social barrier in order to become a Christian. Also influential in the church growth movement was C. Peter Wagner. In his book, *Our Kind of People*, Wagner took McGavran's premise as his central theme, and the book was promoted using the following blurb:

Church growth beyond the melting pot - *Our Kind of People* attacks the Christian guilt complex arising from the civil rights movement and puts it to rest with a skilful mixture of scriptural precedent and human psychology. In doing so, Wagner transforms the statement that "11 a.m. on Sunday is the most segregated hour in America" from a millstone around Christian necks into a dynamic tool for assuring Christian growth.⁴²⁹

It has been argued elsewhere that what became known as the Homogeneous Unit Principle, is an example of a sociological observation that has been turned into a missiological principle without adequate biblical and theological support.⁴³⁰ It may be the case that working with one cultural group is a useful starting point in evangelism and in the early stages of church planting, but the above discussion has underlined significant reasons why it is necessary for new Christians and young congregations to understand early on in their spiritual pilgrimage that they are part of the multiethnic, multicultural people of God and that this understanding should lead in the direction of a more multiethnic expression of church.

The Church as 'Parable' and 'Sacrament'

Vanhoozer has described the church as 'parable' in contrast to the idea of 'sacrament'. But the latter description remains an important one, particularly as we find it in *Lumen Gentium*: "By her relationship with Christ, the Church is a kind of sacrament or sign of intimate union with God, and of the unity of all mankind. She is also an instrument for the

⁴²⁹ C. Peter Wagner, *Our Kind of People: The Ethical Dimensions of Church Growth in America* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1979), back cover.

⁴³⁰ See for instance Charles Taber, *The World Is Too Much With Us: "Culture" in Modern Protestant Missions* (Georgia: Mercer, 1991), 142-145; Rene C. Padilla, *Mission Between the Times: Essays on the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Books, 1985), 142-169.

achievement of such union and unity."⁴³¹ One of the strongest advocates for greater church unity among Malaysian churches and denominations, and for emphasising the link between such unity and the church's reconciling ministry to society at large, is Hermen Shastri, General Secretary of the Council of Churches of Malaysia. Articulating an ecumenical theology, he sees the increasing fragmentation of the Protestant churches in Malaysia as a major hindrance to the church's mission as a whole:

Fragmentation seems to be proliferating... we have a shopping mall ecclesiology. In the context of my work there is not a month that goes by without a complaint relating to a church split. In a multi-religious society like ours this is an important issue to face. Of course, it is one of the most crucial tasks to speak and live for freedom of religion, but the other religions are looking at us and asking 'is that what freedom of religion means to you... to split and form ever more independent groups and fragment the church more and more?'⁴³²

In Shastri's view, whilst "a long ecumenical perseverance" is required among Malaysian church leaders, these leaders lack "the capacity to see it as a key theological task." What is required is an understanding of the church "grounded in the ministry of reconciliation", a significant outworking of which will be the nurturing of multiracial congregations. The multiracial nature of the church should be exploited, explored and celebrated "not only because it is part of our make-up as a nation, but also because it is central to our theological task."⁴³³ Shastri is particularly critical of evangelical churches in Malaysia because he sees them as being most susceptible to fragmentation and to problems resulting from church splits. Statistically, there has been a mushrooming of independent churches in Malaysia in recent decades. The connection between the internal unity of the church and its reconciling mission within a fragmented society is explored further in the themes below.

⁴³¹. Second Vatican Ecumenical Council, Dogmatic Constitution on the Church *Lumen Gentium*, 1.1. A. Flannery, Vatican II: Conciliar and Post-conciliar Documents (Fowler Wright, 1989), chapter 29.

⁴³². Hermen Shastri, interview by author, 17 March, 2006, Kuala Lumpur, mp3 recording, CCM office, Kuala Lumpur.

⁴³³. Hermen Shastri. Interview by author.

This sub-section has underlined an important aspect of the expression of Christian identity in Malaysia: that of the local church demonstrating its internal unity as a multiracial congregation - that is, a reconciled community that embodies something of the unity and integration that the wider Malaysian society continues to search for. Chris Sugden observes, "Important characteristics of mission in a post-modern context will be reconciliation and unity... there is a need for the new community in which the walls of hostility are broken down, in which there is space for all peoples."⁴³⁴ A multiracial perspective within ecclesiology matters for mission.

3. National Unity and Racial Integration

Malaysian missiologist, Tan Kang San, believes that

Race relations could well be the most important issue for the Malaysian church today. Christians in Malaysia need to reflect theologically on the whole issue of race if the church is to be a reconciling community.⁴³⁵

Fifty-three years after gaining independence substantial racial integration in Malaysia remains elusive. K. J. John, a former senior civil servant in Malaysia has defined the concept of national unity as "the willingness of the peoples of a nation to unite and work together in pursuing and sharing the common destiny of a nation."⁴³⁶

⁴³⁴. Chris Sugden, *Gospel, Culture and Transformation* (2000), 73. Though he is not writing about Malaysia in particular, Sugden's point is clear enough, and surely relevant to Malaysia (even without discussing whether or not modern-day Malaysia can be described as a "post-modern context").

⁴³⁵. Tan Kang San, "Historical Insights into the Problem of Race Relations in Malaysia," *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*, Kairos (September 2007): 9.

⁴³⁶. K. J. John, "National Unity: The Goal of Government Policies," *The Christian and Race Relations in Malaysia*, The Christian in Malaysia series No. 1. Eds Michael Moey, Kwan Yoke Lin, Goh Keat Peng (Selangor: Graduates Christian Fellowship, 1986), 37.

National Unity as a Government Priority

The concern for national unity was catapulted to the top of the government's agenda following the 1969 elections when serious racial conflict erupted on the streets of Kuala Lumpur that year, on 13th May. A former Minister in the Prime Minister's Department describes how, in the aftermath of those riots, the concept of national unity began to take a sharper focus in government policy:

Out of the debris of May 13, a lot of positive thinking came about. I would say that some of us were literally forced to think harder about Malaysian society - what had happened? ... it was the realisation that unification and unity were not solidified yet. The positive side also was there in the sense that a lot of us started to think harder on how to unify society, to try and find out what went wrong. After 12 years of independence, why did this happen to us?⁴³⁷

National Unity as a Church Priority?

Participants in the survey questionnaire agreed that national unity is something to which churches ought to be making a key contribution.⁴³⁸ But as the findings have shown, there is little happening at the local church level in terms of initiatives that encourage national unity and racial integration. For example, of those surveyed, almost 60 percent said 'no' or 'not sure' to whether Malaysian churches have been a driving force for national unity since independence. "Polarisation", Thu En Yu points out, "is one of the major issues in Southeast Asia." He then goes on to comment on Malaysia:

It dominates not only the political process, but the entire process of nation building. In order for the society to be prosperous, national integration and reconciliation are vital factors to be tackled in a society such as Malaysia.⁴³⁹

There are internal and external challenges to be reckoned with:

What is at stake is the social cohesiveness and national harmony of Malaysia as a

⁴³⁷. James P. Ongkili, former Minister in the Prime Minister's Department, "National Unity and National Integration", *Negara*, Jilid VII Bil 2 (July 1984), 4, quoted in K. J. John, (1986), 37.

⁴³⁸. The goal of National Unity is the first of nine strategic challenges contained in Vision 2020 – the vision for Malaysia to reach developed nation status by the year 2020.

⁴³⁹. Thu En Yu, "The Church's Ministry of Nation Building and National Integration in Malaysia," *Studies in World Christianity* Vol. 8, Part 2 (2003): 244-263.

community and nation state. This is the challenge internally. Externally, in the rapidly changing world of the 21st century, without cohesiveness and harmony within, the nation will not be able to function efficiently.⁴⁴⁰

Hwa points to earlier days when the “Malaysian church had a powerful impact” on the nation. In recent times however, that influence and impact has diminished because, he suggests, the Malaysian church has ceased to be counter-cultural and is no longer being the salt and light it is called to be (Matthew 5:13-16). In a critique of the Malaysian church, Hwa describes it as “serenely comfortable” in its “middle-class existence” having “generally withdrawn from the world, like a tortoise into its shell.”⁴⁴¹

Models for Social Engagement

For Hwa, there is a connection between the church recovering its counter-cultural influence and its ability to contribute to national unity and integration. What is required is the developing of a “theology of social engagement”⁴⁴² and Hwa offers two possible models of this that Malaysian churches can learn from.

Firstly, says Hwa, Malaysian Christians can emulate the earliest Christians who, though a despised minority, transformed the society around them by loving their neighbours - caring for the poor and the most vulnerable. The demonstration of love towards the needy “was one of the key reasons why, in spite of persecution, the Early Church continued to grow and multiply. People saw that the church stood for something beautiful and they were thus

^{440.} Hwa Yung, “Sustaining and Enhancing Integration through Strategies of Change”, unpublished paper, presented at the Christian Federation of Malaysia 7th National Christian Conference, 20-22 October, 2005, Kuala Lumpur. The theme of the conference was “National Integration and Unity - The Churches’ Response”.

^{441.} Hwa Yung, *Beyond AD2000: A call to Evangelical Faithfulness*, (KL: Kairos Research Centre, 1999), 40.

^{442.} Hwa Yung, *Beyond AD2000*, 39.

drawn to Christ.”⁴⁴³ In the same way, argues Hwa, instead of seeing itself as a beleaguered minority community, Malaysian Christians need a more positive perspective on the world as the sphere of God’s salvific purposes. With the perspective of a strategic minority, Malaysian churches can recover their social impact. This calls for “a rejuvenation of the church’s social outreach to all peoples [which] will help us go a long way towards not only loving our neighbour, but also contributing to social integration in our society.”⁴⁴⁴

Secondly, Hwa draws on David Martin’s *Forbidden Revolutions - Pentecostalism in Latin America, Catholicism in Eastern Europe* (1996). In this work Martin examines two Christian communities in totally different contexts that have created space on the margins of society and yet brought about radical social change that went beyond the margins and into the mainstream of society. Latin American Pentecostals and Eastern European Catholics were able to create and sustain social space that allowed them to effect transformation in their own societies. For instance, notes Martin, as a result of their religious experience, Latin American Pentecostals were able to live lives of discipline and honesty, build strong families and create communities among the poor that offered dignity and hope. Martin describes the effects of this “free space of evangelical activity”:

Where the social world is heaving and cracking with seismic fissures the lava of faith travels in many directions, helping redistribute a new landscape and adapting to a multiplicity of niches...⁴⁴⁵

But these movements on the margins do not set out to be political, and when they do obtain political influence they do not adopt a ‘fundamentalist’ approach:

Evangelical religion in Latin America is a replication (rather than a diffusion) of differentiations long ago achieved in Anglo-American society, whereby religion does not have to be political (i.e. at the core of the polis) but can exercise its

⁴⁴³. Hwa Yung, *Beyond AD2000*, 38. Adolf Hamack, *The Mission and Expansion of the Church in the First Three Centuries* (New York: Harper, 1962) is an important source for Hwa in this first example.

⁴⁴⁴. Hwa Yung, “Sustaining and Enhancing Integration through Strategies of Change”, (2005),

⁴⁴⁵. David Martin, *Forbidden Revolutions - Pentecostalism and Latin America and Catholicism in Eastern Europe* (London: SPCK, 1996), 59.

influence through culture, including the cultural margin. Morally, evangelicals may be conservative, but sociologically, they are one of the forward sectors of radical social change - above all because they help along the fragmentation of an inclusive religious hegemony. This further implies that they themselves will not seek, as would 'fundamentalist' Muslims, to replace one hegemony with another. There never will come a time when the evangelical government of (say) Ecuador imposes the regulations of Deuteronomy on the whole society and abolishes the fiesta and Mardi Gras.⁴⁴⁶

For Hwa then, these are examples for evangelical Malaysian churches of how they too can become "forward sectors of radical social change...". Leaders such as Hwa and Thu⁴⁴⁷ are confident that although the Christian community in Malaysia is a minority, with little real political influence, it can still make a valuable contribution to national unity. The effectiveness of that contribution depends on a "rejuvenation of the church's social outreach to all peoples" - a renewal which, for Thu, must involve the church recognising afresh that it "has a God-given ministry of reconciliation" and that the feuds and conflicts that exist in Malaysia "present an arena for the church to express its divine ordination of peacemaking."⁴⁴⁸ Hwa points out that although the path to national unity must involve "a genuine consensus in the country based on serious dialogue and mutual respect", there is a particular responsibility placed on the Christian community:

For surely as the followers of the Prince of Peace, we are also called to the task of reconciliation. 'Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called sons of God.' (Matthew 5:9).⁴⁴⁹

⁴⁴⁶ David Martin, *Forbidden Revolutions*, 60-61.

⁴⁴⁷ For instance, Ng Kam Weng, Sadayandy Batumalai, Denison Jayasooria. Batumalai has written extensively on inter-faith matters and on Malaysian churches being agents of reconciliation in a divided community. Highly critical of the tendency among Malaysian Christians to be isolationist, one of his key theme is that of 'neighbourology' - a term borrowed from Kosuke Koyama and adapted to the Malaysian context by joining it to the idea of 'muhibbah' - a Malay word meaning goodwill, love, and affection. See S. Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourology: a Theology for Prophetic Living* (Kuala Lumpur, 1986), and *A Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah* (Kuala Lumpur, 1990).

⁴⁴⁸ Thu En Yu, "The Church's Ministry of Nation Building", 253.

⁴⁴⁹ Hwa Yung, "The Role of the Church in Vision 2020," in *Modernity in Malaysia: Christian Perspectives*, ed. Ng Kam Weng (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1998), 69.

4. Interfaith Co-operation

The survey questionnaire found wide agreement in asking if Christians should co-operate with other faiths to work for peace and good race relations. This corresponds with the Merdeka Centre Opinion Poll in which ninety-seven percent said it was important to have more interaction among ethnic groups. The main reasons given for the importance of interaction were “to maintain peace and stability” (16 percent), “to prevent chaos and fighting” (16 percent), and “for national unity” (14 percent).⁴⁵⁰

Inter-faith Co-operation at the National Level

In Malaysia, Christian co-operation with other faiths is mostly limited to the national, formal level. In 1983, the Malaysian government initiated the formation of the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhists, Christians, Hindus and Sikhs (and which later included the Taoist community). Often referred to by its lengthy abbreviation MCCBCHST, the council’s aim is to strengthen co-operation among the minority religious communities and to represent their collective view to the government on a range of issues. Each of the five main non-Muslim religions are represented on the council by an appointed leader. The Christian community is represented on the council by the Christian Federation of Malaysia (CFM). The CFM came into being in 1985 and comprises the Roman Catholic Church in Malaysia, the Council of Churches in Malaysia (CCM), and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF).

The success of the MCCBCHST has been mixed. Some have dismissed its activity as “self-contained fellowship meetings” where “not much serious thinking goes on”.⁴⁵¹ But

⁴⁵⁰. Merdeka Centre Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations, slides 13 and 14.

⁴⁵¹. Paul Monash, *Malay Supremacy: a historical overview of Malay political culture and an assessment of its implication for the non-Malays in Malaysia* (Auckland: Maygen Press, 2003),

such an assessment seems overly harsh. On religious liberty and human rights issues that have affected the minority religions, as well as on aspects of controversial legislation, the MCCBCHST has been effective in communicating a united voice, highlighting injustices and potential problems, and recommending ways forward. These communications have been done through memoranda such as *Unity Threatened By Continuing Infringements of Religious Freedom: Note of Protest by the Malaysian Consultative Council of Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism*, issued in June, 2007. One of the core values of the council is the belief “that Malaysians of all ethnic, religious and cultural backgrounds can best resolve whatever differences of opinion which may arise through peaceful engagement in mutual respect and genuine dialogue.”⁴⁵²

Inter-faith Co-operation at the Local Level

However, whilst formal co-operation, though limited, exists at the national level, there is little evidence of co-operation with other faiths, initiated by Christians at the local level. This is confirmed in interviews conducted with several senior Christian leaders⁴⁵³ who have commented that there is little co-operation but much suspicion. The Executive Director of an international Christian charity which works among all the religious communities in Malaysia makes the following evaluation:

Christians are too suspicious of other faiths... too insecure. There is no willingness to work with others in peacebuilding, tackling poverty... Christian churches tend to

261.

⁴⁵². MCCBCHST memorandum “Respect the Right to Profess and Practice One’s Religion”, October, 2005, included in the memorandum *Unity Threatened By Continuing Infringements of Religious Freedom*, (KL: MCCBCHST, 2007), 8.

⁴⁵³. Rev. Wong Kim Kong, General Secretary, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship of Malaysia, interviewed by author, 1st March, 2006, mp3 recording, NECF Office, Petaling Jaya. Mr. Liew Tong Ngan, Executive Director, World Vision Malaysia, interviewed by author, 6th March, 2006, World Vision office, Petaling Jaya. Rev. Dr. Hermen Shastri, General Secretary, Council of Churches of Malaysia, interviewed by author, 15th March, CCM office, Petaling Jaya. Dr. K. J. John, Executive Director of Oriental Hearts and Minds, interviewed by author, Indian Restaurant, Jalan Dato Mahmud, 7th March, 2006.

shut themselves off from involvement with non-Christians.”⁴⁵⁴

Reasons for this stem mainly from the Christian community's minority status. This has resulted in a preoccupation with survival issues and a general pessimism about future improvement in the area of religious freedom.

Theological Reflection to Meet Local Challenges

It may also be the case that the reason for Christian unwillingness to put words into action in relation to working with other faiths lies in the relative absence of more local theological reflection. For instance, most local congregations have insufficient theological resources that enable them to engage with issues such as interfaith co-operation. Most Malaysian pastors have gone through some kind of formal theological training and will have had the opportunity to take a course on the theology of religions.⁴⁵⁵ But this is no guarantee that they have been able to contextualize this theology for the challenges facing churches in Malaysia, since the vast majority of the text books used in such courses are written by Western authors and with Western contexts in mind. Therefore, attention to contextual theological method is a prerequisite to providing the kind of church leadership that is theologically equipped to provide guidance for congregations to evaluate when it is appropriate or not to co-operate with their surrounding non-Christian communities.⁴⁵⁶ However, it cannot be guaranteed that even with the benefit of greater theological reflection, there will not still be those who will hold to the view that other faiths are so spiritually dark that any co-operation with them will only lead to spiritual compromise and syncretism. In fact, the danger of syncretism has been identified by Batumalai as a major

⁴⁵⁴. Interview with Liew Tong Ngan, 6th March, 2006.

⁴⁵⁵. Courses relating to the theology of religions are certainly present in the curricula of most seminaries and Bible Colleges in Malaysia. However, most of these seminary and college libraries have books giving a predominantly Western perspective on this topic.

⁴⁵⁶. As far as the writer is aware, no Christian denomination has a doctrinal statement or guidelines in place to guide pastors on this kind of issue.

stumbling block to Christians entering into dialogue with other faith communities.⁴⁵⁷ And this leads us to briefly consider the topic of dialogue and some local attempts to facilitate it in Malaysia.

Inter-Faith Dialogue

Lesslie Newbigin has noted the particular danger that ghettoism presents for Christian communities - that of restricting meaningful dialogue with people of other faiths:

Ghettoism... a practical withdrawal into the position of a tolerated minority, a cultural and religious enclave within the majority community. Correspondingly the great need is to find ways of breaking out of this isolation and entering into real dialogue with men of other faiths.⁴⁵⁸

Batumalai has been a prominent Malaysian voice calling the church away from ghettoism and into a more meaningful dialogue and co-operation with other faith communities, especially with Islam. An ordained Anglican minister and former lecturer at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, Batumalai's main theme, developed in his doctoral thesis and continued throughout his other writings, has been the concept of 'neighbourology'. This is a term adapted from the works of Kosuke Koyama and connected to the Malay understanding of 'muhibbah' - an essentially relational word meaning 'goodwill'.⁴⁵⁹ For Batumalai, neighbourology provides a starting point for dialogue. It takes the neighbour as the context for theological reflection, especially the Muslim neighbour:

Our first concern is to know our Malay Muslim neighbour in Malaysia from his

⁴⁵⁷. See Sadayandy Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourology: A Theology for A Prophetic Living* (Kuala Lumpur: Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, 1986). A strong advocate for dialogue, Batumalai reassures his Malaysian Christian readers that he is not in favour of syncretism: "We are not making a suggesting for syncretism. We are only suggesting a critical appreciation of the goodness [of] others. An appreciation must be offered before criticism or judgement. This is a journey of goodwill. Let us not forget that the Gospel challenges both the world and the church." (1986), 4.

⁴⁵⁸. Lesslie Newbigin, *Trinitarian Faith and Today's Mission* (Richmond: John Knox Press, 1964), 28.

⁴⁵⁹. Batumalai's Ph.D. from the University of Birmingham was published as *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourology: A Theology for A Prophetic Living* (Kuala Lumpur: Seminari Theoloji Malaysia, 1986).

historical and religious context. Insight derived from this... will help us in our next task, which is to seek ways and means of involvement, in words and deeds, in working out reconciliation and neighbourliness in daily life. This, it is hoped, will enable a mutual understanding and support for our common good, and a transformation of our society, or 'umma' as Islam would understand it, according to God's will.⁴⁶⁰

Outlining a Malaysian theological agenda, Batumalai believes that a Malaysian neighbourology will put a concern for national unity at the top of that agenda: "Our first concern is the national unity in Malaysia. As Malaysia is a multiracial society, we are on the alert to reduce tension or misunderstanding between the differential racial groups..."⁴⁶¹

As a way of theologising, neighbourology opens up opportunities for exploring co-operation with other faiths for specific aims:

Solidarity or fellowship with God should prepare us for solidarity with our Malaysians of all racial and religious communities. It may be easy to work with or for our own ethnic group. We need to go beyond this parochial mentality. This is our prophetic task.

Proclamation can never exclude political awareness and involvement, even though our government is wary of political responsibilities. We need not initiate a political party of our own but we need to join as partners with others.

The Christian community needs to be challenged to co-operate with non-Christians, the government, social reform movements (e.g. Aliran) and even with the opposition parties, wherever possible, for the good of all.⁴⁶²

Batumalai's theological reflection, grounded in and for the Malaysian context, is commendable. However, his theme of neighbourology lacks a more substantial theological and biblical foundation. Given its potential to connect with the social implications of the biblical doctrine of reconciliation, one is disappointed not to find in Batumalai something approaching the full-orbed theology of reconciliation set out in chapter one of this thesis,

⁴⁶⁰. Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology*, 155.

⁴⁶¹. Batumalai, "A Malaysian Neighbourology (To Know Malaysia is to Love Malaysia): A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourology", *Asia Journal of Theology* Vol. 5 no. 2 (1991): 353.

⁴⁶². Batumalai, "A Malaysian Neighbourology", 355.

from which an application for neighbourology could then be attempted for the Malaysian context.

Further theological reflection in this area has come from Albert Sundararaj Walters, another ordained Anglican who lectures at Seminari Theoloji Malaysia. In *We Believe in One God? Towards A Trinitarian 'Theology From Below*, Walters examines Malaysian Christian understandings of the Trinity and surveys contemporary Asian approaches to the doctrine before attempting to contextualize it for Malaysia.

The method recommended here starts from the historical and socio-cultural experiences of people in their own concrete situation. It takes people's perspectives seriously and looks at the doctrine with a new honesty. The reflections on a 'Trinity from below' approach are based on two common images familiar to Malaysians and that arise from the context: hospitality and friendship, and the banana tree. Both these metaphors, in giving people's experiences of the divine considerable significance, place Jesus in a pivotal position in articulating the Trinity 'from below'.⁴⁶³

There is insufficient space in this thesis for a proper evaluation of Walters' work on articulating a trinitarian theology for Malaysia.⁴⁶⁴ It would surely be intriguing to explore the doctrine from the image of the banana tree, but we must limit ourselves to briefly noting Walter's use of Batumalai's emphasis on muhibbah and neighbourology:

Friendship is a powerful means of cementing our common humanity and of sharing our deepest needs. Muhibbah... or friendship is also a vital means for our common social, economic and political well-being. Friendship, though it is an ordinary social event, has a powerful effect on our lives in Malaysia and it is the best basis for further deeper and lasting relationship... the proper role of a Christian is to increase by participation the concretization of the love of God in history - that is, to be able to present Christ in 'neighbourological' terms. Jesus' insistent accent on living the basic moral and spiritual teachings concerning love of God and love of neighbour in present-day Malaysia, urges Christians into meaningful social engagement, co-operating with Muslims (and people of other faiths) in integrating the spiritual, personal and physical dimensions of human existence. Beyond the

⁴⁶³. Albert Sundararaj Walters, *We Believe in One God? Towards A Trinitarian 'Theology from Below'*, (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 267.

⁴⁶⁴. If one were to attempt such an analysis it would be important to consider the appropriateness of contextualising core Christian doctrine. Walters is sensitive to this issue, but there are those who feel he has surrendered too much in his attempt to build bridges with the Muslim community.

circle of the family, a person seeks friends who will be honest, faithful and true. The Scriptures uphold the ideal of the true friend, while admonishing people to choose their friends carefully, lest they be misled or find themselves abandoned in adversity.⁴⁶⁵

The need for greater muhibbah is emphasised by Walters because in Malaysia “in recent years, partly due to religious resurgence, the various communities have dangerously drifted apart.”⁴⁶⁶ With the exception of some Christians and Muslims who do demonstrate a genuine interest in getting to know each other’s faith and sharing in each other’s lives, “efforts to build personal bridges of friendship within the two communities are few.” And without this core desire for friendship Walters is surely correct when he says that “genuine and respectful dialogue is something which can hardly take place.”⁴⁶⁷

For the most part, Batumalai’s idea of ‘neighbourology’ has not been taken up and developed in any substantial direction by other Malaysian theologians. And apart from writing for the academic community, he has not been as effective as others in disseminating his ideas at a more popular level to influence the mainstream Christian community.⁴⁶⁸ And yet, key aspects of what Batumalai has to say remain powerfully relevant to the Malaysian church and it’s missional task within the wider community:

One of our greatest concerns is racial integration. There is a need for reconciliation. Real Gospel will bear fruit in terms of evangelistic task, effective participation in the socio-political sphere, healing ministry and deliverance. This Gospel also addresses the poverty problem, corruption, racism and other concerns... a vision for effective service to their neighbours.⁴⁶⁹

^{465.} Walters, *We Believe in One God*, 268.

^{466.} Ibid, 271.

^{467.} Ibid, 271.

^{468.} For instance, Ng Kam Weng and Hwa Yung are regular contributors to Malaysian publications readily available to local Malaysian churches, such as the Kairos publication *Understanding the Modern World Through Modern Eyes*.

^{469.} Batumalai, *A Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah* (Kuala Lumpur, 1990), 93.

Inter-Faith Dialogue Encouraged by the Government

“Entering into real dialogue” was encouraged by one of Malaysia’s former Prime Ministers. Soon after coming into office, Abdullah Badawi said there needed to be increased inter-faith dialogue between religious communities. Speaking at the World Council of Churches’ Faith and Order Commission in Kuala Lumpur in 2004, Badawi said that “what we need more than ever today is a concerted effort to initiate inter-faith dialogue.”⁴⁷⁰ At the time this was welcomed by many Christian leaders in Malaysia who shared the view that dialogue is a necessary activity in a multi-faith society for fostering greater understanding between religions. There remains, however, a degree of scepticism among many Christian leaders today as to how serious the Muslim community in general is about pursuing genuine dialogue with other faiths. There also remains a fair degree of apprehension among Malaysian Christians, particularly evangelicals, who worry that interfaith dialogue may lead to compromise and syncretism.⁴⁷¹

The Need for a Working Definition

Interfaith dialogue can mean different things to different people, but if it is understood “as a means of building relationships of trust between those of different convictions and helping to understand others’ points of view” it can become “an important instrument to further mutual comprehension and respect.”⁴⁷² The findings of the Merdeka Research Centre have indicated the need for this sort of mutual understanding. For instance, the Centre’s opinion poll “shows that only 1 in every 5 or 1 in every 3 Malaysians claim to

⁴⁷⁰. World Council of Churches News Release, “Malaysian Prime Minister calls for concerted effort to initiate inter-faith dialogue.” 3 August, 2004. www2.wcc-coe.org/pressreleasesen.nsf/index/pr-o4-30.html (accessed 22 May, 2007).

⁴⁷¹. See Thu En Yu, “The Church’s Ministry of Nation Building and National Integration in Malaysia,” *Studies in World Christianity* Vol. 8, Part 2 (2003), 259.

⁴⁷². J. Andrew Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny: Confronting Contemporary Challenges* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2006), 27.

understand the culture and customs of the three principal ethnic groups in Peninsular Malaysia.”⁴⁷³ To a question exploring levels of trust among Malaysians, the Merdeka poll found that 39 percent of Chinese trust Malays, 38 percent of Malays trust Chinese, and only 29 percent of Chinese and 33 percent of the Malays trust Indians.⁴⁷⁴ According to the Merdeka Centre, these results “indicate that less than half of Malaysians trust fellow citizens of different ethnic backgrounds.” There is also evidence that negative racial stereotypes continue to persist among a high percentage of Malaysians. For instance, 63 percent of Chinese respondents agreed with the statement that, “in general, most Malays are lazy” and seventy-one percent of Malays agreed that, “in general, most Chinese are greedy”. The Centre’s research found that racial stereotypes are so deeply rooted “that a majority of members of particular ethnic groups agree to the negative views of themselves”.⁴⁷⁵ The findings of the Merdeka poll point to the urgent need for dialogue and substantial social interaction among Malaysians. Christians are not exempt from this need, but are well placed, given the racial inclusiveness of the Malaysian Christian community as a whole, to initiate and facilitate dialogue and social interaction.⁴⁷⁶

Andrew Kirk has suggested five principles that can form a working definition for dialogue:

- I. Respect for the dignity and integrity of all human beings.
- II. The need to represent other people’s views fairly.

⁴⁷³. Merdeka Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations, slide 16.

⁴⁷⁴. The Merdeka Opinion Poll did not define ‘trust’. Since the research was investigating inter-ethnic relations it would be reasonable to assume that on this question the poll was attempting to gauge to what extent Malaysians felt they could have confidence in one another in terms of reliability and truthfulness.

⁴⁷⁵. Merdeka Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations, slide 20.

⁴⁷⁶. The results of the Merdeka poll also serve to underline the relevance of the question of identity - a theme we will explore in the final part of this chapter and in the concluding chapter of the thesis.

- III. The need to hear and consider what others say about our beliefs and practices.
- IV. The call to work together in common projects that seek justice and reconciliation in society.
- V. Mutual witness.⁴⁷⁷

This kind of working definition could be usefully explored in the Malaysian context, opening up the opportunity for Christians to respect those signs of God's grace at work in the lives of others. There are goals and aims that other worldviews have which conform to the Christian vision of the Kingdom. Through dialogue with others, local churches and denominational bodies may find scope to work with Muslim, Buddhist and Hindu communities to achieve specific goals in the areas of justice, human dignity and peace. To those who may be apprehensive of such co-operation, Ramachandra offers the following encouragement:

To work alongside people of all faiths and ideologies, without losing the critical questioning and radical challenge that the gospel poses to all faiths and ideologies, requires a breadth of vision and courage that the gospel itself can impart.⁴⁷⁸

Dialogue as Mutual Transformation

A further dimension may be added to Kirk's list - that of mutual transformation. Dialogue offers the potential for each party to be changed in a profound way, and this means that entering into real dialogue involves a certain amount of risk - namely, that as a result of the encounter, we may be challenged to change in some way. This mutual transformation can be illustrated from the New Testament where the radical encounter between Cornelius and Peter, a Roman Centurion and a Jewish peasant, results in a double conversion: Cornelius

⁴⁷⁷. Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny* (2006), 28-29. Kirk provides a brief paragraph of explanation for each of these principles and the whole chapter, "Mission as Dialogue" is devoted to the topic. For a Malaysian perspective, see Tan Kang San, "The Contribution of Evangelical Missiology From an East Asian Perspective: A Study on Christian Encounter With People of Other Faiths." *Iguassu Missiological Consultation: WEF Missions Commission* (1999): 1-7.

⁴⁷⁸. Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Recovery of Mission* (Carlisle: Paternoster, 1996), 271.

comes “to a saving knowledge of Christ”, and Peter “to a deeper discipleship, a more profound conversion of his life and cultural heritage towards Christ.”⁴⁷⁹ Ramachandra offers this important perspective on dialogue:

For the Christian, dialogue is a fundamental aspect of bearing witness to the truth of Christ. Where there is a genuine longing for the other to come to ‘the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ’ (2 Cor. 4:6), there will always be a posture of humble listening. For it is the desire to communicate that motivates us also to listen well. Listening to people involves taking their beliefs, fears and aspirations with utmost seriousness, even being prepared to be disturbed and challenged by them ourselves. All witness, and thus all true dialogue, is a risky undertaking.⁴⁸⁰

An example of how Christian missionaries and Indian churches were challenged as a result of mission among non-Christians is offered by Ramachandra. During the 20th century, many missionaries and Indian Christian leaders had challenged the inequalities of the Indian caste system. But more perceptive Indian Christians began to see how the discrimination that Christian churches were highlighting in the surrounding society, was also present in the churches and among the missionaries themselves, where colour and class discrimination persisted. Transformations that Christians point out need to happen in the world around them may first need to take root within the church itself. The point Ramachandra makes regarding the Indian situation could easily be applied to what is currently happening in Malaysia: a divided church nullifies gospel witness in a divided society.

If Christianity was really concerned with the overcoming of divisions between peoples, then surely the denominational differences among Christians, particularly at the Lord’s Table, nullified the gospel and needed to be overcome if the church was to have a credible witness in a fragmented society.⁴⁸¹

⁴⁷⁹. Vinoth Ramachandra in Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 198

⁴⁸⁰. Ibid, 198.

⁴⁸¹. Vinoth Ramachandra in Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission*, 199.

The theme of unity has been prominent in what has already been explored in this chapter. The connection between co-operating with other faiths and self-identity is also worth bearing in mind. A church which is secure in its self-identity may well be more confident in relating to others in a pluralist society. It would surely be less likely to feel threatened by the thought of co-operating with other faith groups and more inclined to view co-operation as an avenue for Christians to gain a deeper understanding of non-Christian groups and to the opening up of opportunities for meaningful dialogue.

Islam and Inter-Faith Dialogue

It must be acknowledged that despite the call from the former Prime Minister, Abdullah Badawi, for greater inter-faith dialogue, one of the obstacles to Malaysian Christians embracing the benefits of engaging in dialogue is the perception that the Muslim community is itself not prepared to become a genuine partner in dialogue with others. As Batumalai has observed, “Islamic theology in terms of its status in relation to other religions, in particular Christianity, does not encourage dialogue.”⁴⁸²

In Malaysia in general, Malays are not recommended to study other religions or to have religious dialogue... they are kept as an ‘island world’ for fear of being influenced by other religions.⁴⁸³

Muslim authorities refuse to be represented on any inter-faith body in Malaysia. The Muslim community takes no part in the Malaysian Consultative Council which is made up of the five main non-Muslim faiths. Attempts to create other inter-faith bodies which would include Islam have come to nothing because Islam always assumes a priority which it feels would be compromised by sitting at the table as an equal partner with other faiths.

⁴⁸². Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology*, 230

⁴⁸³. Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology*, 92

Recent events have only served to confirm the suspicions of many, that Islam in Malaysia is not serious about inter-faith dialogue. In May, 2007, the Malaysian Government withdrew its endorsement of a high level international Muslim-Christian interfaith seminar to be held in Kuala Lumpur and chaired by the Archbishop of Canterbury, Dr. Rowan Williams. After nine months of preparations by the organisers, the event had to be cancelled just three weeks before it was due to take place.⁴⁸⁴ Yet, even in the face of these sorts of disappointments, interfaith dialogue is something many Christian leaders in Malaysia continue to encourage. Some have identified a conduciveness to it inherent within the cultures South East Asia.

Dialogue, mutual understanding and bridges of friendships must therefore be pursued, both at the personal level and at the communal and international levels. Despite all the pressure we face in South East Asia, Lee Kuan Yew may be on to something in saying, 'the gentle pre-Islamic cultures of these lush equatorial regions have moderated the severity of orthodoxy.'⁴⁸⁵

As far as Batumalai's Koyama-style neighbourology is concerned, it may yet have its day.

A recent study makes this assessment of his theology:

Neighbourology is perhaps not a realistic mode of interacting with the Malay Muslims as long as the present climate prevails. However, the moment a Muslim hand - or even a finger! - is stretched out towards dialogue, neighbourology is the obvious approach to reciprocate. But even highly charged situations can be defused with a neighbourological mindset.⁴⁸⁶

5. Commitment to the Nation

In the 1980s, emigration among Malaysian Christians was such that it warranted a written response from a respected Christian leader. In *Christian Thinking on Emigration*, Hwa

⁴⁸⁴. The *Times* (London) 10th May, 2007. See also Majlis Gereja-Gereja Malaysia (Council of Churches of Malaysia) "Press Statement: Cancellation of Building Bridges Global Interfaith Seminar", (Kuala Lumpur: 10th May, 2007). The seminar was later held in Singapore, in December, 2007.

⁴⁸⁵. Hwa Yung, "Islam in South East Asia and Christian Mission," *Transformation* Vol. 20, no. 4 (October, 2003):221.

⁴⁸⁶. Göran Wiking, *Breaking the Pot: Contextual Responses to Survival Issues in Malaysian Churches*, Studia Missionalia Svecana XCVI (Lund, 2004), 141.

Yung, then a Methodist Minister in West Malaysia, claimed that out of the 25,894 Malaysians who had emigrated to Australia as of 1981, 48.2 percent were Christian.⁴⁸⁷ More recently, in an updated version of that publication, the Kairos Research Centre in Malaysia revised the statistics and claimed that “at least 35 percent of Malaysian immigrants to Australia were Christians.”⁴⁸⁸ Hwa Yung sees this figure as “highly disproportionate... in view of the fact that Christians form only 9 percent of the Malaysian population.”⁴⁸⁹

Two questions in the survey questionnaire focused on the issue of commitment to the nation of Malaysia, and the results show that twenty years on from Hwa Yung’s first article, it continues to be an important area for Malaysian Christians to reflect upon. Of those surveyed, fifty-two percent said they were uncommitted citizens, and almost a third of the respondents said they would emigrate to another country if they had the opportunity to do so.⁴⁹⁰ The Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research also asked a question about emigration and found that those who said they had considered it gave reasons such as “the economy in Malaysia is weak” (14%), and “better job / higher income is possible elsewhere” (14%). Other reasons included “ethnic inequality in Malaysia” (11%), and a “better quality of education elsewhere” (7%).⁴⁹¹

^{487.} Hwa Yung, *Christian Thinking on Emigration*, Graduates' Christian Fellowship, Malaysia (Petaling Jaya: GCF, 1987), 1. The statistics were taken from the article “Asians in Australia” in *Far Eastern Economic Review*, April 17, 1986.

^{488.} Hwa Yung, “Should Christians Emigrate?” *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*, Kairos Research Centre, (October, 2006), 20. The Kairos Research Centre say the statistics are based on the 2001 Australian Census Report.

^{489.} Hwa Yung, “Should Christians Emigrate?”, 20.

^{490.} See the section 'Commitment to the Nation' in chapter three for a discussion on this.

^{491.} Public Opinion Poll on Ethnic Relations. Merdeka Centre for Opinion Research, (February, March 2006), slides 33 and 34.

Why Malaysian Christians Want To Leave Malaysia

According to Hwa Yung, many Malaysians are attracted by better career and educational opportunities in more prosperous Western societies, and many non-Bumiputras consider emigrating because of racial and religious factors. The typical argument runs along the lines of, "Why stay when we will always be treated as *pendatangs* and will never be allowed to fully claim our rights as citizens of the land?"⁴⁹² Other reasons for emigrating include a loss of confidence in the government to act with integrity, transparency, and fairness.⁴⁹³

What factors might lead a significant number of Malaysian Christians to declare such non-commitment to the nation? One contributing factor is the marginalising effects of government impositions on the Christian community. Minorities that suffer significant impositions are prone to a kind of ghettoism: a form of escape within the borders of one's country that entails a gradual disengagement with wider society and the adoption of a survival mode of existence. Such gradual disengagement is understandable when we appreciate the complexity of the challenges facing Malaysian Christians. The background to these complexities have been discussed in chapter two, but here we note the effect on church leadership and the Christian community's self-identity:

The Malaysian church exists as a besieged minority under a government committed to the eventual Islamisation of the nation. The context is further complicated by an unprecedented mix of religion, politics and race... This peculiar situation has a tendency to generate an attitude of ambivalence if not confusion from the Christian community... The constant loss of church leaders due to emigration is symptomatic of the vulnerability of the Christian community to intimidation⁴⁹⁴

⁴⁹². Hwa Yung, "Should Christians Emigrate?", 20-21. "*Pendatang*" is a Malay word meaning "immigrant".

⁴⁹³. Hwa Yung, "Should Christians Emigrate?", 21.

⁴⁹⁴. Ng Kam Weng, "Christian Order and the Civil Order", *Readings in Malaysian Church and Mission* (Petaling Jaya: Pustaka SUFES, 1992), 36.

These difficulties are compounded by a historical factor: the majority of West Malaysian Christians are from Chinese and Indian immigrant communities. Classed as non-Bumiputera, these communities have borne the brunt of the government's affirmative action policies which have left many feeling alienated and impotent. "Not surprisingly", says Ng, "we see widespread indifference in the Christian community."⁴⁹⁵ And for Dennison Jayasooria, the historical factor probes the relationship between indigeneity and patriotism. The West Malaysian Christian community is not indigenous and therefore, according Jayasooria, "its nationalistic and patriotic feelings for the nation is weak... the historical roots are not deep." And therefore, "commitment to the development of a just Malaysian society is sadly lacking."⁴⁹⁶

Remaining in Order to Contribute to Nation Building

But the tendency of Christians to consider emigrating has not gone unchallenged.

Recently, at a Christian Federation of Malaysia National Christian Conference, church leaders from various denominations presented papers on the theme of National Integration and Unity - The Churches' Response. In presenting his paper, Bishop Hwa Yung again posed the question: "Are we really committed to this country?" The sensitivities of the question were obvious:

This is perhaps the really difficult question we face as a Christian community. Are we really committed to this country? This is especially pertinent for those of us who are Chinese and Indians. I probably should not say too much or else I may end up losing many friends. But if my observations are correct, again it appears that the answers are ambiguous. To live as a counter-cultural community and commit ourselves to nation-building in a situation when the dice seems to be loaded against us, will always require a willingness to pay the price of going against the tide.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁵. Ng Kam Weng, "Christian Order and the Civil Order", 36.

⁴⁹⁶. Dennison Jayasooria, *Social Transformation: Theology and Action*, (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian CARE, 1990), 2.

⁴⁹⁷. Hwa Yung, "Sustaining and Enhancing Integration through Strategies of Change", Christian Federation of Malaysia 7th National Christian Conference, 20-22 October, 2005, (Kuala

The earlier part of Hwa's paper outlined a number of ways in which churches could play a greater part in nation-building and national integration. But until Malaysian Christians can give a wholehearted 'yes' to the question of commitment to the nation, Hwa believes their various strategies for nation-building will fail. Goh Keat Peng believes that the church has an important role to play in nation building and this requires that Christians be prepared to stay rather than emigrate:

Since the issue of emigration is tied up with the question of loyalty, this is a serious issue indeed. There is concern that if the number of Christians wishing to leave the country continues to be high the church's loyalty to the country may become questionable and other complications may arise. In a situation like this, Christians must be careful not to slip into despair, cynicism and apathy. They should not abandon the land of their birth.⁴⁹⁸

The question of identity is relevant here. It may well be the case that those respondents who expressed their non-commitment to the nation operate with a theology that emphasises Kingdom citizenship over against earthly citizenship, neglecting to see that "our present citizenship of God's Kingdom is lived out within a specific society and culture" and that being a Christian "should not make us culturally and socially... less Malaysian."⁴⁹⁹ Among those Malaysian Christian leaders who have commented on the question of emigration, there is a consensus that we may summarise as follows: a Malaysian Christian self-understanding, worked out in concrete, compassionate ways within the wider community, can serve to strengthen a commitment among Christians to the nation. In small ways, local church communities can plant 'mustard seeds' - acts of social concern in the local community - that contribute to the goal of national unity and *bangsa Malaysia*.

Lumpur. Unpublished paper), 11-12.

⁴⁹⁸. Goh Keat Peng, "Church and State in Malaysia", *Transformation* Vol. 6 no. 3 (1989): 20.

⁴⁹⁹. Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity", 2-3.

6. Evangelism in a Multi-Religious Society

According to the survey findings, just over half of the respondents agreed with the statement: “we should not share the gospel with people of other faiths because it will contribute to ethnic tensions in our society.” Should we conclude, therefore, that in this case respondents are demonstrating an active concern for peace-building in Malaysian society, by not engaging in evangelism? Not necessarily.

The Church’s Dual Calling

The Christian Church has a dual calling. On the one hand it is called to be a peacemaker. In a divided society where there are racial tensions, peacemaking is a crucial ministry to engage in. Malaysia has had a violent past and racial tensions simmer not far below the surface in what visitors often perceive to be a very harmonious, multiracial country. The necessity for the churches in Malaysia to take seriously their role as peacebuilders is a crucial one, for as Philip Jenkins observes, “the ethnic-religious equation potentially places religion at the heart of future conflict in nations like Malaysia...”⁵⁰⁰

But is the decision not to share the gospel a way of building peace? The present writer feels that this cannot be sustained from a reading of the New Testament. It is not within the scope of this chapter to explore the relevant biblical texts, suffice to say that although peacemaking was a key characteristic of the Early Church, peace at any cost cannot be squared with the worldview of New Testament Christianity. This is because shalom is not an independent entity but is intimately bound up with reconciliation, truth and justice. For the Early Church, peacemaking was carried out within the context of gospel witness.⁵⁰¹

^{500.} Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: the coming of global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 70.

^{501.} See Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 167-171.

This is the other part of the church's dual calling: faithfulness in mission and gospel witness. And where the church exists as a small minority, these two callings are often held in tension.

Fear of Evangelism

Undoubtedly, an underlying issue for Malaysian Christians are the restrictions placed on churches by the government. The most serious of these restrictions prohibits any form of evangelistic activity among the Malay, the majority of whom are Muslim.⁵⁰² The majority of churches in Malaysia are therefore wary of engaging in this sort of ministry and the writer has personally witnessed the sense of fear that grips Malaysian Christians if one talks about sharing one's faith with a Malay. Malaysian Christians remember the infamous Operasi Lallang⁵⁰³ in 1987, when the authorities detained over 100 Malaysians under the Internal Security Act (ISA), many of whom were suspected of Christian activities among the Malay.

Combined with fear there is the racial prejudice, historically rooted, that many Chinese Christians adopt towards the Malay. Reasons for this include the government's promotion of Malay ethnic interests and the corresponding dilution of the rights of non-Malays. Following the racial clashes in 1969 between the Chinese and the Malay, the government set in place the New Economic Policy and later, the National Development Policy, to implement measures that would assist the development of the Malay population. These

^{502.} According to the Constitution all Malays by virtue of their ethnicity are Muslim.

^{503.} Lallang is a tall Malaysian weed and a lallang field is an ideal hiding place for snakes. This 1987 operation was obviously aimed at weeding out the 'snakes'. See Lee Min Choon, *Religious Freedom in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Kairos Research Centre, 1999), 86.

measures, first intended to be short-term but still in existence, have relied on affirmative action policies, or positive discrimination, for their success.

Evangelistic Methods

The reticence of those Malaysian Christians who participated in the survey to sharing their faith with those of other faiths because of the possibility of causing further ethnic tensions, may have more to do with methods of evangelism that are inappropriate to the Malaysian context. Wong Kim Kong, former General Secretary of the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, believes that aggressive evangelism has the potential to stir up ethnic tensions and that in many Malaysian churches the approach to evangelism needs to become less confrontational and more relational. It is important that we hear Wong's assessment:

The church needs to look at [its] evangelistic timetable and also [its] evangelistic methods and strategy. Times have changed and the structure of the society we live in has changed. Thinking and mind-sets and religious sentiments have changed. In the past people were much less knowledgeable... back then the flow of information was almost nil. Therefore with all this extra facility or infrastructure, people ask more questions. The way information is disseminated has changed. People used to receive tracts in their letter boxes – it was a novelty. Today when you open the letter box you have tons of material. Door to door evangelism is not practical – people shut the door. People ask more questions. In a multi-religious context there is a conscious religious revival in each of the religious groups. Among the Hindu community here – there is a revival. It may not be growth, but there is a religious consciousness for the defence of their faith and they can become aggressive. There are issues of identity at work. Therefore with this sort of resurgence there is resistance; the preaching of the gospel has to be much more relevant and contextualized. Therefore it is not just a rhetorical expression of our faith that is needed; that faith has to be strongly witnessed to by the physical lifestyle we live. So to me, the challenge of the Christian witness in terms of evangelism involves more than preaching the word... Our witness has to clearly demonstrate our love – expressed through the word, expressed through the action, [and it must] engage them at the very personal level. We have to develop our relationship with people to gain the right to share [our faith].⁵⁰⁴

The Executive Secretary of the Malaysian Consultative Council for Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Sikhism and Taoism (MCCBCHST), Goh Keat Peng, has talked of

⁵⁰⁴. Interview with Rev. Wong Kim Kong, then General Secretary, National Evangelical Christian Fellowship, 1st March, 2006.

the frustrations felt by Hindus and Buddhists because of the aggressive evangelism that is done in their communities by some Christian groups, and their subsequent triumphalistic parading of new Christian converts. In 2005, the President of the Malaysia Hindu Sangam (MHS) resigned from the Executive Committee of the MCCBCHST, claiming that “the Christian partners do not respect the existence of the Hindu Community in Malaysia.” The MHA called on Christian churches “to immediately stop the unethical methods of lies and falsehoods preached to non-Christians about their respective religions.”⁵⁰⁵

Batumalai, himself a convert from Hinduism, understands the concerns of the Hindu community. He is committed to evangelism and to the freedom to change one’s religion, but does not accept evangelistic methods that may be perceived as unethical proselytism, or that emphasise the rejection of, in his case, Indian culture:

The Hindus are afraid that both Christianization and Islamisation may pave the way to reduce the Hindu population... [that] this conversion, either to Christianity or Islam, will destroy the Hindu individual. It is claimed that this conversion alienates a convert from his family and he is divorced from his culture. As a Hindu convert myself I would tend to agree with the above dilemma. This is partly due to the mistake made by some missionaries who advised new converts to ‘keep away’ from all that is ‘evil’ in Hindu religion and culture.⁵⁰⁶

Evangelistic methods which may be construed as unethical or which denigrate the cultures of others, have been condemned by the leaders of the main Christian bodies in Malaysia, including the Council of Churches in Malaysia and the National Evangelical Christian Fellowship (NECF). But it is those churches linked to the NECF, however, that bear the brunt of such criticism, and not just from Hindu and other non-Christian faith communities but from mainline Christian denominations who accuse independent churches linked to NECF of ‘sheep-stealing.’⁵⁰⁷ This is one of the main reasons why, among the non-

^{505.} Hindu Press International, January 28th, 2005 www.hinduismtoday.com/hpi/2005/1/28.shtml accessed 18 December, 2007.

^{506.} Batumalai, *A Malaysian Theology of Muhibbah*, (1990), 90.

^{507.} Although it is dangerous to generalise, we note here that non-evangelical churches tend to be

Christian faiths, the Christian community in general is not perceived to be a community associated with peacemaking and reconciliation. Goh Keat Peng confirms that from the perspective of the other members of the MCCBCHST, the Christian community is hardly associated with any work of reconciliation within Malaysia.⁵⁰⁸

Mutual Witness

Engaging in interfaith dialogue is one important way for relationships to be developed. One of Andrew Kirk's principles for effective dialogue includes mutual witness. As he points out, this is probably the most controversial aspect of dialogue. However, dialogue and interfaith relations are strengthened when it is openly acknowledged that in some sense "all religions are 'evangelistic' in intent."⁵⁰⁹ Kirk may not be correct to say that *all* religions have evangelistic intentions, for this is surely not the case in Taoism. But in those religions where an evangelistic intent is present, each believes that its understanding of the world, the needs of humanity and the salvific solutions it offers are worth sharing with others. Islam and Christianity are both missionary faiths. Each, to be true to its central beliefs, have an obligation to share their message with others. Although not essential to be true to its core beliefs, Buddhism too is a missionary faith and one which has become more evangelistically active in Malaysia in recent years.⁵¹⁰

less active in evangelism.

⁵⁰⁸. Private conversation with Mr. Goh Keat Peng, 18 December, 2007, Bangsar, Kuala Lumpur.

⁵⁰⁹. Kirk, *Mission Under Scrutiny*, 29.

⁵¹⁰. See for instance the website of the Buddhist Missionary Society Malaysia <http://bmsm.org.my/mix-detail.php?id=1226> (Accessed 25 May, 2007).

Sensitive Evangelism

There are, however, Malaysian churches that do engage in mission among all the various ethnic groups represented in Malaysia. They do so, not in a confrontational way, but with sensitivity and with an understanding of mission that is holistic and contextual to the needs of the community.⁵¹¹ Such Christian witness may involve an element of risk when it is carried out among Muslim communities, but the Malaysian Christians who take such risks believe they have a model to follow in the early Christians themselves who, being a minority community within the Roman Empire, became known as peacemakers in hostile environments, and who at the same time refused to abandon the task of evangelism.⁵¹² Hwa Yung reflects on the church's dual calling to be a peacemaker and a proclaimer of the gospel:

How can this tension be resolved? The only answer we have is that of the cross, the path of servanthood, suffering and martyrdom. We may not forget that Jesus did warn us that some will enter the kingdom of God 'violently' (Mat. 11:12). This will not be a violence sought or practiced by Christians, but rather forced upon them because of the increase of tensions and persecutions in the days ahead.⁵¹³

In multi-faith Malaysia, conversion issues can be extremely sensitive, and this is especially so in the case of Muslims converting to others faiths.⁵¹⁴ But Malaysian theologians and

^{511.} This has been substantiated through a variety of channels. The writer has met individuals who are involved in Christian witness among Malay communities and visited churches actively involved in Christian outreach that includes ministries of social concern in Muslim areas. Due to the sensitive nature of this work and to protect the identities of those involved I cannot provide names, places, or the details of their work.

^{512.} See Alan Kreider, "Worship and Evangelism in Pre-Christendom." The Laing Lecture for 1994, in *Vox Evangelica*, Vol. 24 (1994): 7-38; and Ng Kam Weng, "Social Engagement in the Early Church," *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*. Kairos Research Centre (August 2003): 16-18.

^{513.} Hwa Yung, "Islam in South East Asia and Christian Mission", *Transformation* Vol. 20, no. 4 (October 2003): 220.

^{514.} Recent news articles centring on problematic conversions have included, R. K. Anand, "Muslim or Hindu? A family ripped apart" *Malaysiakini*, Kuala Lumpur, 14th May, 2007; Andrew Ong, "Student converts on fear of failing electrical course" *Malaysiakini*, Kuala Lumpur, 24th May, 2007. See also the helpful summary of what has become the most well-known conversion case in Malaysia in recent times: Jane Perlez, "Once Muslim, Now Christian and Caught in the Courts" *New York Times*, 24th August, 2006. Widely known as the Lina Joy case, a final judgement was given in June 2007, when the appeal court rejected Joy's application to have her identification card changed to reflect her conversion from Islam to

church leaders agree that from a New Testament perspective, evangelism cannot be set aside, and that dialogue itself may be seen as a form of evangelism. Although we are talking here with the Malaysian context in mind, it is surely true that evangelism should always, and in every context, be marked by sensitivity and respect. In Kirk's words, "authentic evangelism has to be conducted in a dialogical manner, in that its method is patience and gentleness, rather than aggression, persuasion rather than threat, an expectation of God's working rather than human enterprise and exertion."⁵¹⁵ And such dialogue and interaction is best carried out by Christians within a context of compassionate engagement in the local community, meeting local needs and co-operating with others for the benefit of the whole community.

7. Identity

In one way or another the theme of identity has cut across virtually all the six themes we have looked at above. This, we believe, is the one that must be reckoned with first of all, if Malaysian churches are to be agents of reconciliation in a diverse and divided society.

The Complexities of the Question of Identity in Malaysia

Albert Walters has observed that "one of the prime questions for religious people today is their identity."⁵¹⁶ The theme of identity in the Malaysian context has been the subject of much scholarly interest and debate.⁵¹⁷ Concerning the Malay, the reconstruction of their

Christianity.

⁵¹⁵. Kirk, (2006), 29. On helpful perspectives on how Malaysian Christians share their faith with friends and neighbours who come from various faith backgrounds, with sensitivity and understanding, see *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*, Kairos Research Centre (August, 2004).

⁵¹⁶. Walters, *We Believe in One God?*, 241.

⁵¹⁷. For example, see Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia*, (Kuala Lumpur: Forum / University of Hawaii Press, 1988); James H. Liu, Belinda Lawrence and Colleen Ward, "Social Representations of History in Malaysia and Singapore: On the relationship between national

identity for political and socio-economic ends from Colonial times to the present has been well documented.⁵¹⁸ The Malay Reservations Act of 1913 became the first formal colonial definition of a 'Malay', being classified as " 'any person belonging to the Malayan race' who habitually spoke Malay or 'any other Malayan language' and who professed Islam."⁵¹⁹ A fuller and more restrictive definition is contained in Article 160 of the Federal Constitution of 1957:

Malay is a person who professes the religion of Islam, habitually speaks the Malay language, conforms to Malay custom and (a) was before Merdeka Day born in the Federation or in Singapore or born of parents one of whom was born in the Federation or in Singapore, or was on that day domiciled in the Federation or in Singapore; or (b) is the issue of such a person.

But the question of identity does not just affect the Malay. It is a complex issue which concerns all Malaysians and has been part of national discourse since Independence. In those initial years of nationhood the government was faced with "the ever-present problems of ethnicity within Malaysian society":

The solution, argued the government, must be to plan for the future and mould a new Malaysian citizen whose loyalty would be to the nation instead of a particular state or ethnic group. Few then would have disagreed in seeing this goal as the only guarantee of Malaysia's survival. It was the interpretation of what should constitute the 'new Malaysian' which became the contentious issue. Although barely acknowledged at the time, the inclusion of Sabah and Sarawak made this

and ethnic identity," *Asian Journal of Social Psychology* 5 (2002): 3-20; Rudiger Korff, "Globalisation and Communal Identities in the Plural Society of Malaysia," *Singapore Journal of Tropical Geography* 22, no. 3, (2001): 270-283; Peter Kreuzer, "Violent Civic Nationalism versus Civil Ethnic Nationalism: Contrasting Indonesia and Malay(sia)," *National Identities* 8, no. 1 (March 2006): 41-59.

⁵¹⁸. See for instance C. W. Watson, "Reconstructing Malay Identity," *Anthropology Today* 12, no. 5 (October, 1996): 10-14; Raymond Lee (ed), *Ethnicity and Ethnic Relations in Malaysia* (DeKalb, Ill.: Centre for Southeast Asian Studies. Northern Illinois University, 1986); Susan E. Ackerman and Raymond L. M. Lee, *Heaven in Transition: Non-Muslim Religious Innovation and Ethnic Identity in Malaysia* (Kuala Lumpur: Forum, 1990); Ooi Kee Beng, "From Malay to Muslim to Melayu Baru... What Next?" *The Straits Times* (Singapore) 10th May, 2007. The anthropologist, C. W. Watson (1996), examines the recent attempts to reconstruct Malay ethnic identity. Watson looks at how politicians and academics involved in this project seek to strip away the colonial stereotype of the Malay which they believe has hindered Malay development. But their attempts to create the New Malay are in danger of substituting one stereotype with another. In Watson's opinion "the risk is great... it might lead to simply an entrenchment within that new identity exacerbating rather than alleviating ethnic divisions." (1996), 14.

⁵¹⁹. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 183.

question far more complex. The categories of Malay, Chinese, Indian and 'lain-lain' ('Others') which had shaped perceptions of society and governance on the Peninsula were hardly workable in the Borneo states, where language and identity were multi-layered, and where the idea of 'non-interference' in traditional life had permitted considerable cultural autonomy among different groups. Even defining what it meant to be 'indigenous' in Sarawak resulted in a semiotic conundrum. According to the 1947 census, it included all those who recognise allegiance to no other foreign territory, who regard Sarawak as their homeland, who believe themselves to be a part of the territory and who are now regarded as native by their fellow men'. Undeterred by such complicating factors, the UMNO dominated Alliance government decided that the basis for creating a future citizenry would be Malaya's traditional culture and heritage, meaning Malay language and culture. Non-Malays however, argued that a more appropriate path was to work towards a Malaysian identity that would reflect the country's multi-ethnic background.⁵²⁰

This quotation illustrates the complexities of identity and ethnicity that have characterised Malaysia since its independence. And because the issue of identity interlocks with a number of other themes, a question on this issue was included in the questionnaire. Respondents were given a choice of six identity markers which they had to prioritise from 1 (most important) through to 6 (least important). The majority of those who answered this question were content to single out the most important identity marker by using the number 1. Of these, half said their primary identity marker was membership of the global body of Christ. But that still leaves a considerable number of respondents who defined themselves primarily by race, language or nationality.

The influence of Islam

The question of identity for Malaysian citizens is not only shaped by the past but also by current developments within Islam, the majority religion in Malaysia. Many commentators both within and outside Malaysia have drawn attention to the resurgence of Islam and its influence on Malaysian society.⁵²¹ It is debated whether or not Islam's growing influence

⁵²⁰. Andaya and Andaya, *A History of Malaysia*, 289-290.

⁵²¹. Chandra Muzaffar has defined Islamic resurgence as "an attempt to recreate an Islamic ethos, an Islamic social order, at the vortex of which is the Islamic human being, guided by the Quran and the Sunnah". *Islam Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1987), 2.

is due to a deliberate process of Islamization. An American theologian with many years of experience in Malaysia summarises the difficulty:

Christians have thus felt a general erosion of their freedoms and place in society, but have difficulty in distinguishing the role being played by Islamisation in comparison to general administrative incompetence, corruption, the NEP and short-term political gamesmanship. Thus, for example, when Christians cannot acquire or convert a piece of property it is never clear whether it is because a Government officer is inefficient, corrupt, has personal religious prejudices against Christians, is carrying out a politically motivated plan to appease local Muslims in the run-up to elections, is keeping the land back for a Government connected entrepreneur, or is carrying out a national policy of Islamisation.⁵²²

What is clear, is that for whatever reason, Islam's influence has increased and is being felt in virtually all aspects of Malaysian society.⁵²³ The response non-Muslims make as a result of their experience or perception of Islamic resurgence has both positive and negative aspects in relation to their sense of identity.

On the one hand the Islamic resurgence has led minority faith communities in Malaysia to pursue their own religious and cultural resurgence as they return to their particular cultural and spiritual roots with a greater degree of devotion. Identity markers therefore become increasingly important as people seek to preserve their cultural and religious heritage. For instance, according to Robert Day McAmis, this can be seen in how "Buddhist and Hindu communities in Malaysia are once again observing almost forgotten traditional religious festivals and rituals."⁵²⁴ But a negative impact is also present where a renewed sense of

^{522.} Robert Hunt, *Islam in Southeast Asia* (Petaling Jaya: Methodist Church, 1997), 9.

^{523.} See for example Sadanand Dhume, "Malaysia Backpedals on Modernity", Yale Global Online, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=9133> Accessed 15 May, 2007. Also, Chandra Muzaffar, *Islam Resurgence in Malaysia* (Petaling Jaya: Penerbit Fajar Bakti Sdn. Bhd., 1987); Hussain Mutalib, *Islam and Ethnicity in Malay Politics* (Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1990); Robert Day McAmis, *Malay Muslims: The History and Challenge of Resurgent Islam in Southeast Asia* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: William Eerdmans, 2002).

^{524.} McAmis, *Malay Muslims*, 88.

cultural and religious identity has increased the polarisation already present in Malaysian society. McAmis observes:

There is very little social interaction among the different religious groups in Malaysia. Pride in one's own religion often results in ridicule of other religions. Religious polarisation combined with ethnic polarisation is a real threat to Malaysian unity, development, and economic stability. Such a situation places a dark cloud over Malaysia's future.⁵²⁵

Islamic resurgence has served to re-enforce the restrictions already placed on the non-Muslim communities. There are significant religious and civil liberty issues that place Malaysia in violation of the United Nations Declaration of Human Rights.⁵²⁶ For instance, it is illegal for a Muslim to convert to another religion. A non-Muslim must convert to Islam before marrying a Muslim. There are restrictions on the building and renovating of religious buildings, the printing and publishing of non-Muslim religious literature, and the availability of visas for pastors and theological lecturers from other countries. In recent years high profile court cases concerning the religious liberties of Malaysian citizens have provoked debate on constitutional issues that many believe need to be addressed so that all Malaysian citizens can enjoy full religious liberty and all can be free to work together for the common good of the country.⁵²⁷

However, the response to Islamic resurgence by many non-Malays - which is to re-assert their own cultural identity - may not be the most effective way forward. One Malaysian-Chinese Christian has described the typical response in these terms:

Non-Malays (including Christians) have responded by protecting our identity and culture. We focus on securing our religious freedom through legal means. Many

⁵²⁵. Ibid, 88.

⁵²⁶. www.un.org/Overview/rights.html (accessed 21 May, 2006).

⁵²⁷. See Wong Kim Kong, "Working Together for the Common Good," *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes* (Petaling Jaya: Kairos Research Centre, September 2007): 20-22; Norhayati Kaprawi (Sisters in Islam), "Nation Building: Uphold Supremacy of Constitution", *New Straits Times* (Kuala Lumpur), Friday, 6th April, 2007.

Christian leaders cite anti-conversion and so-called anti-proselytising laws and refuse to support ministry among Malay Muslims for fear of endangering existing ministries. There is sometimes antagonism towards Islamic rituals and practices. Some Christians have migrated to seek greener pastures... While some of our concerns about Islamic resurgence are valid and there is a definite danger in evangelising to Muslims, we must deny the instinct for self-preservation that has immobilised our witness, entrenched ethnic and religious polarisation, and made migration and legal recourse the only solutions.⁵²⁸

Christian Identity as Kingdom Identity

The Malaysian Anglican theologian, Batumalai, has been highly critical of the divisions among and within the Christian churches. He calls for a wider understanding of Christian identity which can then facilitate the churches' mission of peace and reconciliation within the wider society:

She [the church] stands divided denominationally and in communal groups. This reflects the socio-political system in the country. This is not prophetic identification. By being divided she conveys that she is a 'potted plant' which has not taken root, let alone bearing fruit, though there are signs of hope... There is a tendency, among some Christians, to live in isolation to preserve their denominational identity, rather than to build the family of God (the Christian Umma). How can the church possibly contribute towards this goal, when she is a divided community? Reconciliation begins at home.⁵²⁹

If self-preservation and a pre-occupation with the protection of ethnic and religious identities has stymied Christian witness, then one of the keys to unlocking a more confident witness may lie in a re-configuring of Malaysian Christian identity. This is a recurring theme in the work of Hwa, who locates an understanding of Christian identity within a theology of the kingdom of God.

⁵²⁸. Chan Jin Ai, "Contextualising the Gospel in an Islamic Context," unpublished Master of Christian Studies essay (Klang: Malaysia Bible Seminary, 2006). Chan makes it known in a footnote that she does not mean to imply that there is no place at all for legal action or that people who have migrated have necessarily made the wrong decision.

⁵²⁹. Sadayandy Batumalai, *A Prophetic Christology for Neighbourhood: A Theology for Prophetic Living* (Kuala Lumpur, 1986), 228.

For Hwa, kingdom identity combines the Christian's identity as a member of the body of Christ with his or her identity within their own culture and society. Firstly, Christian identity "is based on... a clear sense of self-worth and self-respect, and the dignity that we have in Christ." But Christian identity is also inseparable from who we are in our cultures and societies, and therefore secondly, kingdom identity "should not make us culturally and socially 'un-Chinese' or 'un-Indian', or less Singaporean or less Malaysian."⁵³⁰ When either of these aspects of kingdom identity is deficient, Hwa believes the church's missional engagement is weakened, that its influence within society becomes piecemeal and that Christians are unable to bring Christian thinking and influence into the wide range of issues facing societies in places like Malaysia:

If they [Christians] have no clear sense of identity of who they are in Christ - a redeemed people who have been given the high privilege of being incorporated into God's kingdom and made his children - it is impossible for them to proclaim the gospel with confidence and clarity. Or, they may have a clear sense of identity and dignity in Christ, but nevertheless lack confidence and rootedness in their own culture, and cannot celebrate what is good therein. That being the case, they will have serious difficulty in impacting their own culture and context with the gospel.⁵³¹

Hwa believes that Asian evangelical theologies exhibit a weak kingdom identity. They may be "strong on the affirmation of traditional Christian doctrines" and yet, "because of their partial domestication by western thought" they often lack a sufficiently holistic identity that is at home in the contexts of Asia:

Thus evangelical churches in Asia have tended to be strong on church growth and cross-cultural missions, but at the same time done little to impart Kingdom values upon the society as a whole. Thus over the past fifty years, evangelical churches in Asia have consciously contributed little to the shaping of the new emerging Asia, culturally or sociopolitically.⁵³²

⁵³⁰. Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity and Christian Mission," The 5th David Adeney Memorial Lecture, Thursday, 31st August, 2000, Singapore Hakka Methodist Church (Unpublished Paper - organised by the Discipleship Training Centre, Singapore), 2.

⁵³¹. Ibid, 16-17.

⁵³². Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity", 18-19.

Christian identity is not therefore a means of escape from the social realities of life, neither is it focused only on the individual. Writing about the theological emphases of Evangelicals in Asia, Beattie observes that

Asian writers have put particular stress on the communal dimensions of the kingdom both in terms of the narrower Christian community and its life and also by using the kingdom as a more holistic concept of how God seeks to be at work in society. This latter dimension is seen as an important counter to Asian religious critiques of Christianity (particularly in Islam) as individualistic.⁵³³

This is the line that Hwa takes in constructing an understanding of Asian Christian identity which is comprehensive, confident and expressed primarily through the community of the church. It is comprehensive in terms of its scope in working out Christian values into all areas of Asian life; it is confident in that it bolsters Christian communities with a self-understanding that can withstand the pressures exerted on Christian minorities in many Asian contexts. And it is an identity expressed in and through the community of the local church in order for it to engage with the wider non-Christian communities that surround it.

Albert Walters sees the challenge in these terms:

Being a Christian in Malaysia now is more a matter of living out a distinctive witness to the possibility of human community than of 'preoccupation with self-identity' at the public and corporate level.⁵³⁴

Christian Identity Shaped through Patterns and Models of Christian Discipleship

For Hwa, the outworking of a kingdom identity begins with discipleship, which must include a focus on Asian [Christian] heroes such as Sadhu Sundar Singh and John Sung, as role-models for today's Asian Christians.⁵³⁵ More than this, Malaysian Christians need to

⁵³³. Warren Beattie, "Evangelical paradigms of mission in Asia: the influence of biblical foundations in shaping a more integrated theology of mission," OMF Mission Research Consultation 2007, OMF IHQ, Cluny Road, Singapore, 17-21 September, 2007 (Unpublished paper), 11.

⁵³⁴. Albert S. Walters, *We Believe in One God? Reflections on the Trinity in the Malaysian Context* (Delhi: ISPCK, 2002), 242.

⁵³⁵. Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity", 21.

recover their “forgotten heritage” of Asian Christianity.⁵³⁶ This is not as straightforward as it may seem, given the attempts of “mischievous historians” who suggest “that the Church is a legacy of colonialism, and that Christianity gained a foothold in Asia because Christians worked in collusion with the colonial masters.” Muslim, Hindu and Buddhist communities in Malaysia commonly speak of Christianity as a Western religion that does not naturally belong in Asian contexts. In some quarters this kind of perspective is used “as a convenient excuse... to call upon the authorities to restrict Christian activities and ban conversion on grounds that national development should eventually phase out all vestiges of colonial legacy.”⁵³⁷ The idea that Christianity is a Western religion is so pervasive that Malaysian Christians themselves seem to believe it, given how little they know about their Asian Christian heritage, and how much Western-style Christianity has been imported into Malaysian church life. There is a sense of urgency then in the development of discipleship patterns that will help form a Christian identity in Malaysia that celebrates the gospel’s deep roots in Asia’s rich soil. An acquaintance with the sort of perspective Samuel Hugh Moffett provides in his monumental *A History of Christianity in Asia*, would be welcomed by Hwa and others:

It is too often forgotten that the faith moved east across Asia as early as it moved west into Europe... With some outstanding exceptions, only intermittently has the West looked beyond Constantinople into Asia and given attention to the long, proud traditions of Christianity that chose to look neither to Rome nor to Constantinople as its centre. It was a Christianity that has for centuries remained unashamedly Asian.

Moffett reminds us that the church began in Asia:

Its earliest history, its first centres were Asian. Asia produced the first known church building, the first New Testament translation, perhaps the first Christian king, the first Christian poets, and even arguably the first Christian state. Asian Christians endured the greatest persecutions. They mounted global ventures in missionary expansion the West could not match until after the thirteenth century.⁵³⁸

⁵³⁶. Ng Kam Weng, “Two Millennia of Asian Christianity: A Forgotten Heritage,” *Understanding the Modern World Through Christian Eyes*, Kairos Research Centre (November, 2003), 6-8, 30.

⁵³⁷. *Ibid*, 6.

⁵³⁸. Samuel Hugh Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, Volume 1: Beginnings to 1500

And this linkage with the past also helps both Western and non-Western Christians to identify with the wider family of God. As Ramachandra explains:

All those in whom Christ dwells through faith, all who have been accepted by God in Christ, are now family members... What this means is that, for me as an Asian Christian, Augustine and Irenaeus, Teresa of Avila and Mary Slessor, Calvin and Bonhoeffer all become my ancestors, part of my personal family tree. And for Western Christians, their family tree now includes John of Damascus, Panditha Ramabai, Sadhu Singh, Kagawa and a host of outstanding Asian Christian men and women.⁵³⁹

Since it is primarily at the local church level where discipleship takes place, the question may be asked: how can this sense of Christian identity be formed in those who profess to follow Christ? There is no need at this point for a discussion on appropriate components for effective discipleship programmes, but we pause to consider one example from a local church context in Malaysia.

In an essay offering a Christian model for racial integration in Malaysia,⁵⁴⁰ M. Selvendran says that if the Christian's primary identity is as a member of the global Body of Christ, then, in a society that has experienced serious racial division and conflict, such an affirmation should be included in baptismal confessions in Malaysian churches. For support, Selvendran turns to Richard N. Longenecker's interpretation of the Apostle Paul, who "was deeply concerned to show that ethnic exclusivity has no place in the Church."⁵⁴¹ Paul's bold statement to the Galatians that, "there is neither Greek nor Jew" (Galatians

(Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1998), xiii.

⁵³⁹. Vinoth Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict? Christian Integrity in a Multi-Cultural World* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 136. Ramachandra has borrowed here from Andrew Walls and his well known description of the dynamic tension of Christian conversion as the 'indigenizing principle' and the 'pilgrim principle'. See Andrew F. Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture" in *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Maryknoll / Edinburgh: Orbis / T. & T. Clark, 1996), 3-15.

⁵⁴⁰. M. Selvendran, "The Christian Model for Racial Integration", in *The Christian and Race Relations in Malaysia*, The Christian in Malaysia Series No. 1, eds Michael Moey, Kwan Yoke Lin, Goh Keat Peng (Petaling Jaya: Graduates Christian Fellowship, 1986): 43-50.

⁵⁴¹. Selvendran, (1986), 49.

3:28), is echoed in passages such as 1 Corinthians 12:13 and Colossians 3:11, and may well be evidence of a baptismal confession.⁵⁴² A precedent for an affirmation of identity to be included in a baptismal confession may be found in the Barmen Declaration of 1934. This was a declaration adopted by the Evangelical (Protestant) Church opposed to the German Reich Church during their first synod held in Barmen, Westphalia, in May 1934. The six-point declaration was deliberately constructed as a witness to the gospel and a proclamation of the Lordship of Christ to a particular set of challenges facing the churches in 1930s Germany. Barmen has been described as "a truly revolutionary document",⁵⁴³ and one would expect a parallel confession, directed to the 21st century Malaysian context, to be as equally far reaching. Selvendran asserts that it is not only necessary that the Christian's primary identity be found in his or her membership of the global Body of Christ, but this must be affirmed without, as Longenecker puts it, "the renunciation of racial characteristics or ethnic distinctions."⁵⁴⁴ And so we are back with Hwa and the components of a kingdom identity.

Developing Malaysian Christian Identity

We conclude this sub-section on Christian identity by noting that Malaysian church leaders face the challenge of encouraging Malaysian Christians not only to identify themselves as part of the wider Christian Church but to express in the fullest sense, what it means to be a

^{542.} Selvendran draws on the work of New Testament scholar Richard N. Longenecker, *New Testament Social Ethics* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984): 33-46.

^{543.} Arthur Cochrane, "The Message of Barmen for the Contemporary Church," in *The German Church Struggle and the Holocaust*, eds. Franklin H. Littell and Hubert G. Locke (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1974), 193, cited in John de Gruchy, *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1984), 129.

^{544.} Longenecker quoted in Selvendran, (1986), 49.

Malaysian Christian. This is no easy tension to maintain, as Peskett and Ramachandra explain:

The atoning work of Christ has broken down all human barriers, so that one new humanity is born out of the old fragmented, alienated race (cf. Eph. 2:14-18; Gal. 3:28; John 10:16 etc.). Accepting Christ as Lord, therefore, involves commitment to a new global community through which all our prior loyalties are redefined. A Christian's primary identity is now derived from the body of Christ, and no longer from biological family, ethnic group, denominational affiliation or nation states. This inevitably leads to conflict, since these other human associations no longer have absolute priority over our lives.⁵⁴⁵

As we draw this section to a close we remind ourselves of Hwa's connection between a clear sense of kingdom identity and the effectiveness of the church's missional engagement and participation in "the shaping of the new emerging Asia, culturally and sociopolitically."⁵⁴⁶ A more confident Christian identity, rooted in the Malaysian context, is also connected to the church's ability to reach out to the 'other' and to co-operate with non-Christian communities in Malaysia. Hwa's emphases, together with those of other authors mentioned in this sub-section, would suggest that a stronger self-identity, rooted in the gospel and in the people of God, will be necessary if Malaysian churches are to have a reconciling ministry.

Conclusion

This chapter has identified seven key themes that have emerged from chapter three's survey questionnaire. Our exposition of these themes has allowed the concerns and perspectives of grass roots Malaysian theologians and church leaders to be heard on certain issues surrounding our main focus of reconciliation and peacemaking. Our study in this

⁵⁴⁵. Howard Peskett and Vinoth Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (Leicester: IVP, 2003), 201-202. The tensions involved in the redefining of loyalties and of identity have been common to Christian communities since the early church. These tensions have been identified and described by Andrew Walls in terms of two historical trends: the pilgrim principle and the indigenising principle. See Andrew Walls, "The Gospel as Prisoner and Liberator of Culture," *The Missionary Movement in Christian History: Studies in the Transmission of Faith* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1996).

⁵⁴⁶. Hwa Yung, "Kingdom Identity", 19.

chapter has demonstrated the importance of allowing contextual theological perspectives to be brought to bear on an important theological theme such as reconciliation.

We have covered a wide range of theological and missiological topics in this chapter, from trinitarian foundations for mission, to church planting strategies, and to what we mean by interfaith dialogue. But at the centre of themes one to six lies the question of self-understanding, and the picture emerges that the effectiveness of Malaysian churches as reconcilers and peacebuilders depends crucially on Malaysian Christians knowing who they are, and developing a strong sense of identity which has historical as well as contemporary significance. We will develop this line of thought in the final chapter by exploring Christian identity and its importance in developing a peaceable disposition which is essential for Christian witness in a multicultural context.

Chapter 5: Identity and the Ethos of Peacemaking

*...the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.⁵⁴⁷*

In this chapter we will concentrate on the climactic theme of identity from chapter four, demonstrating its connection with peacemaking, and giving thought as to how such an identity is shaped and sustained. The key dimensions of Christian identity will be explored, with particular focus placed on its ecclesial aspects. We will argue that an ethos of peacemaking is created and sustained when Christians understand that their identity has been transformed and reshaped in Jesus Christ. As we draw towards our conclusion the work of Dietrich Bonhoeffer will be briefly used to support the idea that peace is created as a result of the integration of the self and sustained not in isolation but in fellowship with our neighbour.

Strategy or Spirituality?

If it is asked, What needs to be in place, and to happen, for Malaysian churches to exercise a comprehensive ministry of reconciliation? answers might point us in the direction of strategy. Reconciliation programmes could be developed, seminars run, projects launched, techniques taught. Much good work would undoubtedly emerge from this kind of approach, but would it be capable of sustaining an ongoing reconciling presence within Malaysian society? Robert Schreiter points us in a different direction. It is spirituality rather than strategy, he suggests, that sustains a ministry of reconciliation. "When most people think about the concept of reconciliation" says Schreiter, "they are likely to expect

⁵⁴⁷. T. S. Eliot, 'Little Gidding'.

discussion of techniques...".⁵⁴⁸ His emphasis, however, is on "the role of a supportive spirituality":

The hard work of rebuilding broken societies will take more than plans to effect change. It takes a spirituality rooted in the memory of the crucified Christ and hopeful of the coming together of all things in the risen Lord to sustain us in the long and arduous work of reconciliation. For that reason, reconciliation is more of a spirituality than a strategy.⁵⁴⁹

The term 'spirituality' has historically been associated with the Roman Catholic and Orthodox churches. Within the Catholic Church it has been used in connection with particular religious orders, and Catholics may therefore speak, for instance, of Franciscan or Carmelite spirituality. But the term has broadened in recent years both in terms of who uses it, and what it encompasses. It is now used to talk about spiritual life and activities that are not only wider than Catholicism but go beyond Christianity itself. The influence of eastern religions in the West has given rise to a wide range of literature and practices all subsumed under the term 'spirituality'.⁵⁵⁰ As Schreiter observes, " 'spirituality' has come to mean interest in the transcendent without commitment to any organised religious tradition." People may not necessarily want to be religious, but they are very open to exploring various aspects of spirituality. Schreiter uses 'spirituality' in a strictly Christian sense to mean

a distinctive and coherent set of ideas, attitudes and practices which represent a way of living out the Gospel message. In terms of a spirituality of reconciliation, this would mean taking the theology of reconciliation... and translating it into a way of life and action for... today.⁵⁵¹

⁵⁴⁸. Schreiter, "The Spirituality of Reconciliation and Peacemaking in Mission Today" in *Mission, Violence and Reconciliation* ed. Howard Mellor and Timothy Yates (Sheffield: Cliff College, 2004), 31

⁵⁴⁹. Robert J. Schreiter, "Globalisation and Reconciliation," in *Mission in the Third Millennium* ed. Robert J. Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 142.

⁵⁵⁰. A visit to the spirituality section of any major bookseller will confirm this, whether in Malaysia or in the U.K.

⁵⁵¹. Schreiter, "The Spirituality of Reconciliation and Peacemaking in Mission Today" in *Mission, Violence and Reconciliation* ed. Howard Mellor and Timothy Yates (Sheffield: Cliff College,

Schreiter's emphasis on spirituality is commendable and he is surely on the right track. His various works provide ample evidence to support his approach. But perhaps a change in terminology, for reasons we will outline presently, would be helpful for our purposes. Schreiter's use of the term 'spirituality' is used in texts designed, for the most part, to be read and used by pastors, ministers and missionaries, groups for whom the term 'spirituality' is well understood. But outside of such groups it has taken on various meanings:

For many, it is a permanent dreamlike quality - a mild anaesthetic to carry you through the turmoil each day brings. For others, spirituality represents rare or spasmodic mystical experiences, which might be induced through mind-altering drugs... Some forms of spirituality rely on meditation techniques to release the human potential buried in the subconscious. Other forms encourage individuals to open themselves to spiritual forces from highly questionable sources that have the nasty habit of taking control once they have gained entry.⁵⁵²

Gibbs and Coffey contrast these dubious forms of spirituality with what they term "biblical spirituality". This "is concerned with bringing our body and soul into an intimate relationship with the heart of God. It is concerned with holiness, which means that it relates to every aspect of life, as lived from day to day, rather than focusing on transient experiences."⁵⁵³ Clarifications such as these are helpful. But given the association of the term 'spirituality' with those perceived to be Christian 'professionals', and that in wider circles "through overuse its meaning has worn thin",⁵⁵⁴ 'spirituality' may not, therefore, be such an accessible term for the wider Christian public in Malaysia. Schreiter's own definition of spirituality helps us identify a possible alternative term that avoids both the narrow association with particular traditions and offices within Christianity, and the evasive, slippery nature of the term spirituality. He writes that a spirituality of

2004), 31

⁵⁵². Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 140.

⁵⁵³. Ibid, 140.

⁵⁵⁴. Ibid, 140.

reconciliation is really all about "a way of life and action". It is, in other words, about disposition. We therefore suggest the term 'ethos', taking our lead from Birger Gerhardsson who believes the Bible has much to say about "the kind of people we ought to be and the way we ought to behave; that is, with humankind's 'ethos' in the sense of attitudes and behaviour which conform to norms."⁵⁵⁵ In his much neglected book *The Ethos of the Bible*, Gerhardsson's method is to take a selection of books from the New Testament in order to demonstrate a "basic *unity* in the midst of the Bible's *diversity*" so as to provide "a synthetic sketch of the Bible's ethos." While at this point we will not immerse ourselves in the details of Gerhardsson's findings, we should take note of one of his main points concerning the ethos of the Bible:

It has arisen among a people over a long period of time under varying fortunes; nevertheless, a strong faith characterised this people at all times, *shaping their outlook both on life in general and on the duties of humanity - those of society as well as the individual's*.⁵⁵⁶

Other aspects of Gerhardsson's work will be referred to at a later stage, but it is his basic approach to the formation of a sense of ethos and ethics that we want to underline and commend at this point.⁵⁵⁷ There are substantial complexities in the Malaysian situation when one thinks about how churches can exercise a reconciling ministry. There are few, if any, easy answers. But solutions and long-term progress can be substantially realised if a biblical ethos is intentionally cultivated. By way of illustration, in Luke 12:13, Jesus is confronted with a problem: "Teacher, tell my brother to divide the inheritance with me." Two men are in dispute. Jesus replies: "Man, who made me a judge or arbitrator over you?" The dispute remains unresolved, immediate reconciliation unrealised. But Jesus

⁵⁵⁵. Birger Gerhardsson, *The Ethos of the Bible* (Oregon: Wipf & Stock, 1981), 1.

⁵⁵⁶. Gerhardsson, (1981), 117. Emphasis added.

⁵⁵⁷. In its original philosophical context, the Greek word 'ethicos' is associated with the area of character. It therefore shares something in common with the present day usage of the word 'ethos', which, as Stephen Plant has noted, has to do with "the prevailing tone or sentiment of a people, community or group, and the characteristic spirit of a system or institution." Stephen Plant, *Bonhoeffer* (London/NewYork: Continuum, 2004), 5.

continues: "Take care, and be on your guard against all kinds of greed...". What we must see here, with its wide implications for the topic at hand is how, as Stephen Williams explains, "Jesus urges that we so dispose our spirit that all disputes, in the end, will be tractable."⁵⁵⁸ What we are proposing in this final chapter is that a reconciling ministry is sustained by a particular ethos. In our opening chapter we presented the case for reconciliation to be seen as the "organising principle" for understanding the salvation of God, the central theme of New Testament theology, indeed, the thread that runs through the whole narrative of the Bible - from the glimmer of light in Genesis 3:15, through to the all-encompassing Pauline vision in Ephesians of the reconciliation of all things, and culminating with the great multitude of diverse peoples gathered before the throne in Revelation 7. Could we not go as far as to say that the biblical narrative is therefore aiming to form within the people of God an ethos of peace and reconciliation? A lifestyle that is shaped by the reconciling work of Christ? A lifestyle that is itself, in the midst of all the world's brokenness, a peacemaking way of life?

A note on evangelicals and social ethics

In speaking of lifestyle and ethos, we have entered the domain of ethics. Anything approaching a thorough overview of evangelical approaches to social ethics is beyond the scope of this thesis, but it should be noted that this is an area in which evangelicals have not been particularly strong. This has been acknowledged by one of the most prominent evangelical leaders of the twentieth century, John Stott.⁵⁵⁹ In his book *The Contemporary Christian: an Urgent Plea for Double Listening* (1992), Stott calls evangelicals to develop an attentive ear to the Word of God *and* to the world in which they live. Responding to a

⁵⁵⁸. Stephen Williams, "Modernity and Morality", in *Faith and Modernity* eds Philip Samson, Vinay Samuel and Chris Sugden (Oxford: Regnum Books, 1994), 161

⁵⁵⁹. Stott was named in *Time* magazine's "100 Most Influential People" (10 April, 2005).

question asking in which areas evangelicals need to make greater headway, Stott is quoted in a recent biography as saying

we need to go beyond evangelism... we must look beyond evangelism to the transforming power of the gospel, both in individuals and in society... My hope is that in the future, evangelical leaders will ensure that their social agenda includes such vital but controversial topics as halting climate change, eradicating poverty, abolishing armouries of mass destruction, responding adequately to the AIDS pandemic, and asserting the rights of women and children in all cultures. I hope our agenda doesn't remain too narrow.⁵⁶⁰

Towards the end of the nineteenth century another prominent voice of his day called for greater attention to the area of ethics. James Orr looked to the twentieth century with the following hope:

If, however, I were asked in what I think the distinctive peculiarity of twentieth-century Christianity will lie, I should answer that it is not in any new or overwhelmingly brilliant discovery in theology that I look for it. The lines of doctrine are by this time well and surely established. But the Church has another and yet more difficult task before it, if it is to retain its ascendancy over the minds of men. That task is to bring Christianity to bear as an applied power on the life and conditions of society; to set itself as it has never yet done to master the meaning of the "mind of Christ," and to achieve the translation of that mind into the whole practical life of the age - into laws, institutions, commerce, literature, art; into domestic, civic, social and political relations; into national and international doings - in this sense to bring in the Kingdom of God among men. I look to the twentieth century to be an era of Christian Ethic even more than of Christian theology.⁵⁶¹

Theological development along a whole host of lines is still required, and in his time, Orr contributed more than his fair share. But the situation remains, as Williams has pointed out, "that our ethical thought is proportionately underdeveloped in relation to our doctrinal thought."⁵⁶² A possible reason for this underdevelopment is that evangelicals have often concentrated on what makes them doctrinally and theologically distinctive from other parts of the Christian church. Evangelical theology has rich ties to the Protestant Reformation, a

^{560.} Roger Steer, *Inside Story: The Life of John Stott* (Leicester: IVP, 2009), 268.

^{561.} James Orr, *The Progress of Dogma* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1901), 383, in Stephen Williams, "The Theological Task and Theological Method" in *Evangelical Futures: A Conversation on Theological Method* ed. John G. Stackhouse (Grand Rapids / Vancouver: Baker Books / Regent College, 2000), 173-174.

^{562.} Stephen Williams, "The Theological Task", 173.

context where the issues at stake were essentially dogmatic in nature, rather than matters of social ethics. This is not to say that one cannot find a concern for moral theology in the works and ministries of the Reformers. It is simply to recognise that doctrinal questions dominated the Reformation scene and that evangelicals have spent a disproportionate amount of time setting out doctrinal distinctives compared to thinking through issues in ethics. We are giving attention to this matter at this juncture because what is being proposed in our final chapter is not primarily a matter of theological development, but the application of theology to the formation of a social ethic. This should not come as a surprise, for in the opening chapter special attention was given to the social implications of the doctrine of reconciliation, and chapter four followed various lines of enquiry which, in summary, could be described as seeking to connect the Malaysian church's love for God with love for neighbour - the two essential compass points directed by Jesus. As we turn to consider the formation of a biblical ethos and a Christian identity, and how these are connected with peacemaking, we must remember that 'peace' - following its usage in the bible - has a social and political dimension, essentially because the witness of those who demonstrate that their identity is in Christ play an important part in shaping the future of their society. So in this final chapter we are exploring ways to aid the Malaysian church in its formulation of a social ethic, specifically in its witness as a reconciler in Malaysian contemporary society.

Identity as a Theological Priority

As we survey the theological landscape of Malaysia, and with the challenge of peacemaking very much before us, any number of issues present themselves as areas for special consideration. But which of these deserve priority? Martin Luther offers us this warning:

If I profess with the loudest voice and clearest exposition every portion of the truth of God except precisely that little point which the world and the devil are at that

moment attacking, I am not confessing Christ however boldly I may be professing Christ. Where the battle rages, there the loyalty of the soldier is proved and to be steady on all the battlefield besides, is mere flight and disgrace if he flinches at that point.⁵⁶³

Luther's words remind us that it is strategically wise to enter the battle at that point where it matters most. Have we gathered sufficient information to enable us to see the larger picture? Can we, with confidence identify where the 'battle rages'? Our analysis of the Malaysian context directs us to the question of identity. This, to keep the military metaphor, is the target for our discussion in this chapter. The theme of identity was singled out as the integrating factor among the seven themes of chapter four. But its importance in terms of theological priority has been recognised in contexts beyond Malaysia. In Beattie's assessment "the issue of Asian Christian identity is central for discussion of the Asian character of theology and missiology."⁵⁶⁴ Vanhoozer, noting the "turn to context" evident in the work of theologians across the globe, sees the search for identity as "an important new factor in third world theology."⁵⁶⁵ And Michael Amaladoss identifies a direct link between the question of identity and that of the promotion of harmony, stating that "one of the obstacles that prevent Christians from playing their proper role in promoting harmony in South Asia is that they are not sure of their own identity and rootedness."⁵⁶⁶

Our thesis here is that a reconciling and peacemaking presence within a complex, divided society like Malaysia necessitates a particular ethos among those who would exercise that presence. This is a way of thinking and acting, shaped and sustained by an identity rooted

⁵⁶³. Cited in Vernon White, *Identity* (London: SCM, 2002), 71.

⁵⁶⁴. Warren Beattie, "Transformational Missiology", 215.

⁵⁶⁵. Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?", 97.

⁵⁶⁶. Michael Amaladoss, "Identity and Harmony: Challenges to Mission in South Asia" in *Mission in the Third Millennium*, ed. Robert Schreiter (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2001), 39.

in history, and which in turn is able to ground a strong, valid, healthy sense of identity in the contemporary church. Our aim will be to demonstrate that being an agent of reconciliation is directly linked to our effectiveness in bearing witness to an identity given by Christ. This identity promotes a disposition to be peacemaking and reconciling.

The Substance of Identity

Firstly then, what do we mean by identity? In a recent study Vernon White defines it

as an inclusive term covering all significant and distinctive aspects of human being. As such it includes biologically determined aspects of our nature and being to do with sex, race, kinship and bodily identity. It includes culturally determined aspects of human being, such as gender identity, nationality, social role. It also involves character and disposition.⁵⁶⁷

White very helpfully discusses the substance of human identity, exploring aspects of human personhood which correspond to divine personhood. We will briefly summarise White's points. Firstly, there is a unitary nature to our personhood. In other words, there is something inherently enduring about our identity. "Just as God is and remains who he is as the one and same God in time and eternity, so do we (even into eternity)."⁵⁶⁸ In the biblical narrative we encounter individuals called by God and who experience great changes, even name changes, but who still remain the same person. There is continuity and endurance of identity no matter how profound the changes they pass through. Secondly, White discusses freedom as an aspect of human personhood - something which "is integral to our status as creatures in *imago dei*..."⁵⁶⁹. The question concerning the extent of human freedom is not one that we are able to pursue here, apart from saying that this is a qualified freedom which allows us to "contribute or co-operate in becoming ourselves..."⁵⁷⁰. Choices and

⁵⁶⁷. White, *Identity*, 44.

⁵⁶⁸. Ibid, 49.

⁵⁶⁹. Ibid, 53.

⁵⁷⁰. Ibid, 53.

decisions matter because they shape character and disposition and these are aspects of human identity affected by more than simply biology. Thirdly, there is the aspect of particularity. Human identity involves "being a particular person... bound to particular space and time and identified with a particular gender, race, personality."⁵⁷¹ This too corresponds with the divine identity - supremely with the particularity and uniqueness of Jesus of Nazareth who is "the critical means by which the transcendent God can then relate effectively (and savingly) to all particulars *as* particulars."⁵⁷² What might seem to be a restrictive aspect of identity is nothing of the sort. It would be impossible for human beings to relate effectively without a sense of our own particularity. White puts it well when he says that particularity "is not a prison to break out of but the prism through which we too relate most effectively to other particulars in the world. We fulfil our personal identity as people of particular background and particular calling."⁵⁷³ It is important to note what is not being said here. This is not a form of "disconnected particularity" common in postmodern perspectives of 'difference' - where disconnectedness is absolutised, and which leads too often, in White's opinion, "to chaos and irresponsibility."⁵⁷⁴ The particularity which White argues for has missional dimensions:

This celebration of particularity which fulfils identity is not the retreat to tribalism. Instead, it is the sort of blessing of Abraham which will make him a blessing to others; it is the sort of incarnation in Christ which will enable God, through him, to reconcile *all* things; it is the sort of affirmation of the racially denigrated which will empower them to love rather than withdraw; it is the sort of cultivation of institutional or national identities which will motivate wider responsibilities rather than self-preoccupation.⁵⁷⁵

^{571.} White, *Identity*, 54.

^{572.} *Ibid*, 54.

^{573.} *Ibid*, 54.

^{574.} *Ibid*, 55.

^{575.} *Ibid*, 55.

Finally, personhood has a profoundly relational dimension to it. The theological basis for this is found in the relationality of the Trinity: "it belongs eternally to God's trinitarian being and in God's temporal relation to the world..."⁵⁷⁶ There is nothing abstract, static, or isolated about personal being. Our identity, individually and collectively, is relational. But relationality opens us to change, and it is on this point that White brings together the relational and unitary aspects of human identity to suggest change as something which strengthens identity rather than fragments it:

change [is] something which contributes to the potential fulfilment of human identity, not just threatens it. This is a direct implication of a relational and unitary notion of personhood. An isolated notion of the person could fulfil her individual identity without change: this is as true of the disconnected postmodern person as it is for the classic Cartesian ego of modernism. But an essentially related and unitary person cannot be truly himself in isolation from the change entailed by his connectedness with other people and situations through the sequence of time.⁵⁷⁷

This is a framework of human identity, grounded in Christian theology. And as White points out, it is a framework that "finds ready resonance in many empirical anthropologies and common-sense perceptions."⁵⁷⁸ We have only briefly surveyed White's work, but drawn sufficient profit from it to send us further in our topic. There are particular strands from White's outline of personhood that deserve further attention in light of the challenges facing Malaysians in their role as peacemakers. We will therefore set our course according to the historical, the relational, and then the ecclesial aspects of Christian identity.

The Dimensions of Christian Identity

⁵⁷⁶. White, *Identity*, 52.

⁵⁷⁷. Ibid, 53.

⁵⁷⁸. Ibid, 55.

Historical

With the hazards of generalisation in mind, we make the following, cautious, observation: increasingly in today's world, people (particularly younger people), are less shaped by the past than were previous generations. In the opening paragraphs of chapter one we noted the increasing awareness that we live in what is being described as a "world society";⁵⁷⁹ that territorial spaces are said to be an illusion, with countries no longer able to shut themselves off from the rest of the world;⁵⁸⁰ that never before has humanity so self-consciously viewed itself as a single entity.⁵⁸¹ This thesis is concerned with the specific realities of life in Malaysia, but the effects of globalisation mean that young people in Kuala Lumpur are often viewing the same television programmes, listening to the same music and participating in the same lifestyle trends as their counterparts in cities across the globe. This has profound effects on how identity is now defined and understood. Whereas modernity saw personal identity in abstract, isolated terms, postmodernity produces a view of personal identity characterised by transience and a profound disconnection. Many therefore suffer from the effects of a rootless identity. And as we have noted from Amaladoss, peaceableness, even among Christians, is hindered because of uncertainty surrounding identity and rootedness. Where then is our starting point for articulating Christian identity? Some may want to start with the individual, or with his or her own personal history. Newbigin, however, has a different view:

In distinction from a great deal of Christian writing which takes the individual person as its starting point for the understanding of salvation and then extrapolates from that to the wider issues of social, political, and economic life, I am suggesting that, with the Bible as our guide, we should proceed in the opposite direction, that

⁵⁷⁹. Vinoth Ramachandra, "Global Society: Challenges for Christian Mission," *Anvil* 21, no. 1 (2004): 11. See also Ulrich Beck, *What is Globalisation?* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), and William T. Cavanaugh, *Theopolitical Imagination: Discovering the Liturgy as a Political Act in an Age of Global Consumerism* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clarke, 2002).

⁵⁸⁰. Ramachandra, "Global Society" (2004), 11.

⁵⁸¹. Sweet, McLaren and Haselmayer, *'A' is for Abductive*, (2003), 138.

we begin with the Bible as the unique interpretation of human and cosmic history and move from that starting point to an understanding of what the Bible shows us of the meaning of personal life.⁵⁸²

Western, and often evangelical, expressions of Christianity lean heavily towards the individual. We are not over-reacting against this, because as we shall see, the individual's understanding of their Christian identity is crucial for peacemaking. But at this point Newbigin helps us to see that Christian self-identity *begins* not with the individual but with the larger biblical story, the mission of God. The gospel is not about me but about the world and what God has done, is doing, and will do, to accomplish his missional purposes for the whole of creation. The answer to the question 'who am I?' begins with the story of salvation and who we are within the people of God. Rowan Williams approaches the question of identity in this way. Suppose someone says to you "Identify yourself!" Very likely our response will be to give our name, then some description of our occupation, our place of origin, and in many cultural contexts we would say something about who our parents are.

To speak about 'identity', then, is to speak about how we establish our place in the language and the world of those around us: names are there to be used, to be spoken to us, not just by us; work is how we join in the human process of transforming our environment; and who we are becomes clear to those around when we put ourselves in a map of relationships.⁵⁸³

And if as Christians we are challenged to identify ourselves, then, says Williams, we must respond that we carry the name of Christ, and have been drawn in to the story of God's faithfulness to his redemptive commitments:

We are the people who are known for their loyalty to, their affiliation with, the historical person who was given the title of 'anointed monarch' by his followers - Jesus, the Jew of Nazareth. Every time we say 'Christian', we take for granted a story and place in history, the story and place of those people with whom God made an alliance in the distant past, the people whom he called so that in their life together he might show his glory... We are involved with that history of God's

⁵⁸². Lesslie Newbigin, *The Gospel in a Pluralist Society* (London: SPCK, 1998), 128.

⁵⁸³. Rowan Williams, "Christian Identity and Religious Plurality" *Archbishop's address to the 9th meeting of the World Council of Churches, Porto Alegre, Brazil, 14-23 February, 2006* www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/sermons_speeches/index.html (accessed 8th June, 2006)

covenant... There is no way of spelling out our identity that does not get us involved in this story and this context.⁵⁸⁴

Where does this story, this redemptive history begin? Having cautioned against beginning with the individual to define Christian identity, we are now obliged to turn to a particular, solitary individual: Abraham! Isaiah directs our gaze: "look to Abraham, your father..." (Isaiah 51:2). All those who have been embraced by the gospel and who have become part of the contemporary church trace their spiritual identity back to this archetypical man of faith. Following Paul's example, we trace our identity to Abraham, to whom the gospel was announced in advance (Galatians 3:8). Here is the starting point for defining Christian identity: Abraham, "the ancestor of all who believe" (Romans 4:11). How strategic that Abraham is mentioned in the first verse of the first book of the New Testament! Abraham is the self-defining link of the people of God. Matthew's mention of Abraham along with the genealogy which follows, establishes the history and at the same time, points forward to the future of the people of God. Matthew locates the present - what God is doing in and through Jesus Christ - in terms of the past and the future. The people of God are past and future people. Therefore without the connection to Abraham, Christians have no sense of history and this affects their outlook to the future. If there is little grasp of where we have come from, and of where we are going, this signals a profound lack of identity, which in turn affects the ability of Christians to live with integrity in a fast changing world and especially through times of national or personal crisis.

Christian identity rooted in Abraham entails certain hermeneutical foundations. The limitations of space mean that several brief points will be noted but not elaborated upon. Firstly, by encouraging Christians to "look back to Abraham" we are recommending an

⁵⁸⁴. Williams, "Christian Identity".

identity based on a hermeneutic that understands the church of today to be "the Israel of God" (Galatians 6:16). We note that Paul does not describe the church as "the new Israel", and that this phrase does not occur in the Bible. We find that Jesus appointed his people to inherit the new Covenant foreseen by Jeremiah (31:31-34 cf. 1 Corinthians 11:25), that Paul spoke of Christians as children of Abraham, together with Isaac (Galatians 4:28), and that Paul also described believers as "the circumcision" (Philippians 3:3). That this is the true situation of the Christian church can be illustrated from the way in which James takes the prophecies of Amos to explicate the mission of the church (Acts 15:15ff).

By and large, Malaysian Christians struggle to articulate an historically rooted Christian identity, and one would be hard pressed to find a group of Christians seeking to construct such identity using the perspective of Abraham as "the ancestor of all who believe". Malaysian Christians are not so historically minded (in this sense at least). Again, mindful of the dangers of generalisation, we offer the following as possible reasons for this mindset. Firstly, it may have something to do with the relatively high percentage of first and second generation Christians in Malaysia. For many in this category following Christ entails rejecting the past in order to embrace what is new in Christ. For such Christians conversion to Christianity often means a radical break with all that was associated with old loyalties. Among such believers the need for historical rootedness has not yet been ignited. Secondly, the absence of a strong Christian identity with historical roots may also be the result of Malaysian Christians having succumbed to the influence of the dominant non-Christian community which promote the idea that Christianity has little or no roots in Asia and is therefore alien to Malaysian soil. Thirdly, given that corporate worship in many churches no longer includes liturgy or the recital of creedal statements, and has for the most part abandoned the singing of Psalms and older hymns, there is little in the

contemporary Malaysian service of worship to provide a sense of history, to connect the congregation with the people of God through the ages.⁵⁸⁵ But among those involved in theological reflection there is a growing sense of urgency about the need for a Malaysian Christian identity with a strong historical dimension. Beattie has identified a similarity in this respect in both Indian and Malaysian Christian contexts. In Beattie's view this "reflects the pressures on Christianity in India and Malaysia with the impact of resurgent Hinduism and Islam."⁵⁸⁶ For Vinay Samuel, Asian Christian identity must draw from contemporary and historical Asian components, and from the Christian Scriptures - particularly from the Old Testament. This is a dual identity which expresses a continuity with both Asian and biblical histories:

No matter what nationality we may be, the Old Testament does not say to us 'this is akin to how God acted in your history' but rather 'this is your history.' Old Testament history is a formative part of all Christian history and so we might say that all Christians participate in two histories - both Judaeo-Christian and ethnic.⁵⁸⁷

Samuel therefore sees the new identity in Christ integrated with the Asian identity. This sense of continuity is also found in Ramachandra:

It is the incarnation, death and resurrection of God in Jesus Christ that enables us to say that human history is finally meaningful... It is only in the light of this conviction of a once-for-all, public defeat of death and evil that we can affirm the abiding worth of other histories and individual human stories...

The Christian thus has a double nationality: his own former loyalty to biological family, tribe, clan or nation is retained, but is now set within a wider and more demanding loyalty to the global family of Christ. This new adopted family stretches back in time as well as outward in space. It spans the generations as well as cultures and nations. It reaches back to Abraham and to the faithful since Abraham, so that every new convert now finds his or her history drawn into the history of Israel in

^{585.} This is not the case in every congregation, but it is typically so in most Protestant evangelical and charismatic churches in Malaysia today. The author has encountered this during ten years of Christian ministry in Malaysia and heard concerns such as these consistently raised in seminars on the theology of worship, conducted in Malaysia Bible Seminary 2003-2009.

^{586.} Beattie, "Transformational Missiology", 216.

^{587.} Vinay Samuel, "God's Intention for the World - Tensions Between Eschatology and History". In *Mission as Transformation*, eds. V. Samuel and C. Sugden (Oxford: Regnum, 1999), 174, cited in Beattie, "Transformational Missiology" 216.

the Hebrew Bible and that of the people of God of the New Testament age..."⁵⁸⁸

However, this is not the view of all Asian theologians. For instance, C. S. Song and Michael Amaladoss "suggest that Asians should see a discontinuity between the experience of the people of God in the Old Testament and their own experience."⁵⁸⁹ These theologians perceive a disconnect between Asian cultures and biblical history, given the gospel's late arrival in many Asian contexts and that Christianity has therefore had very little impact on Asian cultures. But this sort of perspective is far from dominant among third world theologians. According to John Parratt the "dynamic search for self-identity" going on in third world theology is "an identity which takes seriously the traditions and cultures in which it is located."⁵⁹⁰ If we turn to the African continent for a moment, and to the work of Kwame Bediako, we find there also the quest for an integrated identity, that takes seriously the historical and cultural roots of the African in forming a contemporary Christian identity in the African context: "Without memory we have no past, and if we have no past, we lose our identity."⁵⁹¹ In Asia, much theological work remains to be done on the question of identity. As Vanhoozer notes, there is still the complaint "that Christian theology may be *in* Asia, but it is not yet *of* Asia."⁵⁹² Ramachandra, Samuel and Ng argue for Asian Christians to allow themselves to be shaped by their own histories while at the same time celebrating their inclusion within the history of the people of God.⁵⁹³

⁵⁸⁸. Ramachandra, *Faiths in Conflict?*, 130, 136.

⁵⁸⁹. Beattie, "Transformational Missiology", 216.

⁵⁹⁰. John Parratt, *An Introduction to Third World Theologies* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 7.

⁵⁹¹. Kwame Bediako, *Jesus and the Gospel in Africa: History and Experience* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 2004), 51.

⁵⁹². Vanhoozer, "One Rule to Rule Them All?", 98.

⁵⁹³. The importance for Christian witness in a Buddhist context of a Christian identity rooted in Abraham has been described by David Filbeck. In Thailand the fact that Buddha was born before Christ is seen by many Thai as an effective apologetic against Christianity. For the Thai, the older the person the more respect they are due. Filbeck realised that "if it were important to Thai thinking that the older deserves more respect, then it was important for me -

It may be useful at this point to briefly consider the distinction between 'Asian' and 'Malaysian' identity. We noted in chapter four that for the purpose of the thesis we are often using these terms interchangeably, particularly when discussing theological and missiological issues which are in sharp contrast with Western theological emphases. Malaysians, of course, see themselves as Asian, but their historical journey since independence has helped shape their current sense of Malaysian identity. However, as we saw in chapter two, what exactly constitutes Malaysian identity is a much debated question, and a more comprehensive discussion would have to include, for instance, exploring the relationship between the *Bumiputra* and non-*Bumiputra* categories of identity since their creation in the 1960s, as well as the concept of *bangsa Malaysia*. It could be argued that one core element, present in any attempt by Malaysians to articulate a sense of identity, is the plurality of Malaysian society. Within the context of diversity there is a strong relational element to what it means to be Malaysian. Without denying the surface level aspect of its marketing slogan, there is a sense in which Malaysian identity is encapsulated by the Malaysian tourist board who promote 'brand Malaysia' with the tag line - *Malaysia - Truly Asia*. Diversity is indeed part and parcel of Malaysian identity. However, we should remember the comment of Cheah Boon Kheng who reminds us that "since its birth, Malaysia has lacked a clear cut sense of national identity."⁵⁹⁴ In the recently published work, *Multiethnic Malaysia*, it is argued that

in order to make my message creditable - to select someone from the Bible who was born before Buddha and therefore deserving great respect as well. Abraham was the obvious choice. He was the choice for two reasons. First, Abraham was born 1500 years before Buddha. Second, since few in Thailand have ever heard of Abraham, his name associated with that of Buddha would cause puzzlement, a puzzlement which would require an explanation of who Abraham was. This in turn would afford an opportunity to explain that the salvation God offers through Jesus Christ alone did not begin with the birth of Jesus Christ or of Christianity, but that it began long before when God called Abraham out of Ur of Chaldees and made a covenant with him." David Filbeck, *Yes, God of the Gentiles Too: The Missionary Message of the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Billy Graham Centre, 1994), 60.

⁵⁹⁴. Cheah Boon Kheng, "Ethnicity in the Making of Malaysia," in *Nation-Building: Five Southeast Asian Histories*, ed. Wang Gungwu (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2005), 93.

ethnicity itself has been constructed in such a restrictive way not only by the state but by key civil society agents that it has become in Malaysia... a rigid marker used to divide people instead of being applied in more expansive and encompassing terms. We may thus conclude that despite shared historical experiences and common cultural references the 'recovery of self' from a colonial legacy, which had as its ideological core not only the construction of white superiority but also the production of ethnic difference among the colonised, has proved daunting for Malaysians.⁵⁹⁵

In theological writings, Malaysian and other Asian theologians such as those mentioned in the paragraphs above, often speak of 'Asian' theology in a way that distinguishes it from the emphases and historical development of 'Western' theology. Within such discussions one also finds Malaysian theologians seeking to articulate a more Malaysian sense of Christian identity and doing so by using that strongly relational dimension present in Malaysian society. For instance, writers such as Thu En Yu use the concept of *muhibbah* and Batumalai builds on Koyama's *neighbourology*. In sum, given the complexities of the identity question within Malaysian society, the small number of Malaysian theological writers, combined with the fact that the Malaysian church remains relatively young, it is understandable that a clearly defined sense of *Malaysian* Christian identity is still waiting to emerge. Adapting Vanhoozer's line, we might say that "Christian theology may be *in* Malaysia but it is not yet *of* Malaysia." Is it too much to suggest that the key to the "recovery of self" for Malaysia as a whole, is in the hands of Malaysian Christians as they wrestle with the theme of identity?

Our proposal for the following sections in this chapter is that since the figure of Abraham and the theme of identity are so closely connected in Scripture, we tie in the promises of God to Abraham in Genesis 12, with our exploration of the theme of identity.

⁵⁹⁵. Sheila Nair, "Colonialism, Nationalism, Ethnicity: Constructing Identity and Difference" in *Multiethnic Malaysia: Past, Present and Future* ed. Lim Teck Ghee, Alberto Gomes, Azly Rahman (Petaling Jaya: Malaysian Institute of Development and Asian Studies / Strategic Information and Research Development Centre, 2009), 93.

Relational

White's work on identity emphasises its intrinsic relational aspect and how "our personhood exists by its relation to other persons, divine and human."⁵⁹⁶ The same is found in Ramachandra's recent book, *Subverting Global Myths*. In a chapter on the topic of human rights he states that "the theological understanding of human personhood is that we image God in relationality. Just as God's being is dynamic relationality, so we are constituted as persons through webs of interconnectedness."⁵⁹⁷ The new identity given to the Christian in the gospel provides historical rootedness so that he or she is drawn in to the biblical narrative and connected with the people of God through all of history. As Ramachandra says, "It spans the generations as well as cultures and nations. It reaches back to Abraham and the faithful since Abraham..." To explore the relational dimension of Christian identity we must resume our journey with Abraham.

The election of Abraham is "the first expression of God's redemptive concern for all nations."⁵⁹⁸ But Genesis 12 must be understood first of all within the context of Genesis. Gordon Wenham has commented, "These verses are of fundamental importance for the theology of Genesis, for they serve to bind together the primeval history and the later patriarchal history and look beyond it to the subsequent history of the nation."⁵⁹⁹ Wenham alerts us to the context of these verses and to the order of the biblical account. Before introducing us to God's solution in Abraham, the author of Genesis describes the devastating extent of human sin in the first eleven chapters which cover the fall, the flood

^{596.} White, *Identity*, 45.

^{597.} Ramachandra, *Subverting Global Myths* (Leicester: IVP, 2009), 115.

^{598.} Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2003), 57.

^{599.} Gordon Wenham, *Word Biblical Commentary: Genesis 1-15*, (Waco: Word Books, 1987), 274.

and the failure of Babel. Particularly striking are chapters 10 and 11, which contain the stories of the table of nations and the tower of Babel - two stories that provide interdependent perspectives on the world as it was before the emergence of the patriarchs. In Genesis 10 we have a comprehensive survey of nations, all with a common descent from Noah. Verse 32 states: *These are the clans of Noah's sons, according to their lines of descent, within their nations. From these the nations spread out over the earth after the flood.* And this can be taken as a fulfilment of Genesis 9:1, where Noah and his sons are commanded to "be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth." As the nations spread out, we are given a picture of a positive unity. Contrast this with chapter 11, where, instead of spreading out, people come together. Fearful of disintegration they are motivated "to make a name" for themselves and so they embark on a building project. Volf describes it in these terms: "A single 'place,' a single 'tongue,' and single 'tower'... Humanity will be securely unified and manifestly great."⁶⁰⁰ But the project ends in failure and "the unity of the human race is shattered" as the "search for security, unity and technological mastery founders in disarray, dispersal and divine disapproval."⁶⁰¹ Humankind learns that "differences are irreducible" and that "political, economic, and cultural centres must be plural. Unity ought not leave 'scattering' behind."⁶⁰²

Genesis 12 is the outworking of God's answer to the human problem. Perhaps we are meant to see the five-fold use of "bless" in verses 2-3 as cancelling out the five curses on man and his world in 3:14, 17; 4:11; 5:29; 9:25.⁶⁰³ Whether that was the intended parallel

^{600.} Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace*, 226.

^{601.} Peskett in Peskett and Ramachandra, *The Message of Mission* (2003), 95.

^{602.} Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), 226-227. Volf goes on to say that "a misplaced fear of disintegration nourished by the desire for false glory led to the rejection of salutary 'scattering' and to the oppressive universal 'gathering'." (1996), 227.

^{603.} See Wenham's commentary on Genesis 12:3, pages 276-278, for a full discussion on the

or not, "the contextual background" as Motyer says, "is all the lost blessedness of Genesis 3-11."⁶⁰⁴ The fundamental relationships have been shattered: in the fall, humanity lost the full blessing of being in the image of God; in the flood, humanity came under the judgement of God and lost peace with God; and in the failure of Babel, humanity was scattered so that it lost its social cohesion, the blessing of true society. The story of the Bible can therefore be viewed as the outworking of the covenant promise to Abraham that through him and his descendants the whole world would be blessed and so find healing and integration. The promise is that in Abraham's 'seed' "will be the blessing that the world lost through the Fall, the Flood and the scattering."⁶⁰⁵ At the climax to the Bible's story, the final chapters of Revelation bring us to the new creation in which reconciliation and restoration are now a reality, God is dwelling with his people in a new creation (Rev. 21: 1-3; 24-26), the nations are healed (Rev. 22:2), resulting in a transformed society. The New Testament is clear that Jesus is that seed in whom the nations recover the blessings they have lost and that through his sacrificial death on the cross the image of God is restored, men and women find peace with God and are brought to a full harmonious society. The blessing of Genesis 12 therefore has relational elements in both vertical and horizontal directions: "*vertically*, those who are blessed know who it is that is blessing them and seek to live in faithful relationship with their God..." and "*horizontally*, the relational element of blessing reaches out to those around."⁶⁰⁶ In the words of Bengt

grammatical structure of verse 3.

⁶⁰⁴. Alec Motyer, *Look to the Rock: An Old Testament background to our understanding of Christ* (Leicester: IVP, 1996), 224.

⁶⁰⁵. Motyer, *Look to the Rock*, 156.

⁶⁰⁶. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 210.

Sundkler, "the task of mission is to break the curse and replace it by understanding and unity."⁶⁰⁷

By rooting their identity in Abraham, Christians in Malaysia will not only have historical roots to their faith, but also a relational dimension to their identity because the blessings fulfilled through Abraham are deeply relational, establishing comprehensive integration: peace with God, peace with others, peace with ourselves, and peace with the environment. Further, in the fulfilment of the promises to Abraham, Gentile together with Jewish believers now belong together within the one people of God. But at this point we must draw the relational aspect of Christian identity closer to Christ himself.

Rowan Williams has said that "we are more than servants and witnesses, because we are enabled to speak as if we were, like our king, free to be intimate with God: God has stepped across the distance between ourselves and heaven, and has brought us close to him."⁶⁰⁸ This is possible because of what Christ has done on our behalf. Williams takes this further when he writes that "Christians identify themselves not only as servants of the anointed king but as Christ" for this is what it means to "bear the name of Christ". Therefore "Christian identity is to belong in a place that Jesus defines for us. By living in that place, we come in some degree to share his identity, to bear his name and to be in the same relationships he has with God and with the world."⁶⁰⁹ When Christians understand themselves to "bear the name of Christ" and when they gather "in the name of Christ", they

⁶⁰⁷. Bengt Sundkler, *The World of Mission* (London: Lutterworth, 1965), 12.

⁶⁰⁸. Rowan Williams, "Christian Identity".

⁶⁰⁹. Williams, "Christian Identity".

are living in such a way that demonstrates "he is the 'determining ground' of their lives; in him they have found freedom, orientation, and power."⁶¹⁰

The ethos of the Bible is a relational, social ethos. Gerhardsson reminds us that "fellowship is regarded as of fundamental significance for human beings", because we have been created in and for relationship. The dimensions of reconciliation and peace are clear in how Gerhardsson expresses the relational aspect of the Bible's ethos:

the heart of stone must be replaced with one of flesh so that one can open oneself to a trusting and active fellowship with one's Creator and with others and enter into a proper relationship with the rest of creation.⁶¹¹

Here is what we see as the key to a disposition towards peacemaking. It flows from restored relationships - to God and to neighbour, and it depends entirely on the transformation of the heart. That which is needed to live a life that pleases God is given by God himself: "The demands which he makes are thus adequate and proper. When they are internalised in a person's heart, that person functions as the Creator intended, in relation both to other people and to the whole of existence."⁶¹² This ethos is "fellowship-oriented" - it is grounded in an identity that is relational: "maintained not by isolated individuals but by a community...". This is a fellowship which bears certain marks. One is holiness - it is a "kingdom of priests and a holy nation", called to offer themselves to God "for the good of the world". It is also a self-giving fellowship: "the individual for the fellowship, and the people of God for the world."⁶¹³ And it is an inclusive fellowship, for in the teaching of

^{610.} Volf, *After Our Likeness: The Church as the Image of the Trinity* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 1998), 146.

^{611.} Gerhardsson, *The Ethos of the Bible*, 120.

^{612.} *Ibid*, 118.

^{613.} *Ibid*, 134.

Jesus he "speaks of a love which is to include all, including foes and persecutors."⁶¹⁴ This is a "fellowship of love" which, as the Gospel writers (especially Luke) point out, "breaks through the boundaries prescribed by holiness" in first century Judaism. In Paul, it is a fellowship open to all ethnicities because the dividing wall has been broken down between Jew and Gentile.

Gerhardsson draws our attention to the pressures that such a fellowship may have to endure and what the right response should be from the people of God when trials intensify. The Bible's ethos has an inward dimension in the way it addresses the transformation of the human heart. But as Gerhardsson points out, it has a social dimension, a fellowship priority and a built-in inclination to serve the wider world. But persecution can thwart that inclination and bring about the exact opposite.

In both Jewish (the Dead Sea Scrolls, the Books of the Maccabees) and early Christian writings (the Johannine books) there appear symptoms typical of times of persecution; not only a strengthening of the fellowship within the people of God, but also a walling in, a defensiveness, and a curtailed love. Part of Jesus' programme according to the synoptic tradition is that love is to be maintained and self-sacrificing action to be carried out even in times of martyrdom. Even when darkness falls on all sides, generous sacrificial, vulnerable love is to continue.⁶¹⁵

We have moved quite a distance from Abraham and Genesis 12. But the promised blessing there, as we have seen, is very much concerned with the restoration of blessings lost. The brokenness and disintegration brought about by the Fall, is remedied by Christ who brings restoration, intimacy with God, and transformation of life. A key component of that transformation is the gift of a new identity. This identity brings personal integration, a disposition to peaceableness and "a generous sacrificial, vulnerable love" which is possible

⁶¹⁴. Ibid, 134.

⁶¹⁵. Gerhardsson, *The Ethos of the Bible*, 136.

even in times of great darkness. The sustaining of this identity and ethos is impossible without relationality.

Ecclesial

The historical and relational dimensions have in several ways already pointed towards the ecclesial aspect of Christian identity. This too can be traced to Abraham, the "ancestor of all who believe." The church's roots extend back further than the events of the Day of Pentecost. Its beginnings are found in the call of Abraham. We will therefore begin by exploring what an ecclesial identity looks like in a church that has grown so significantly and is so diverse. Can there be any coherence to an identity that spans so many centuries and so many cultures? We will then turn our thoughts to the called out nature of God's people and what being part of a pilgrim church means for Christian identity. Finally we must consider what the ecclesial dimension of Christian identity means through the lens of a pivotal passage in Ephesians.

The outworking of the covenant promise of Genesis 12, has resulted in a Christian movement comprehensive in size and diversity. Wright expresses the deep sense of excitement shared by many in seeing the extent of global church growth: "What a privilege it is to be living in an era when God's promise to Abraham, that he would bring blessing to all peoples and nations, is being so remarkably fulfilled in the phenomenal growth of the global church."⁶¹⁶ We are not concerned here with the growth of World Christianity per se, astounding though the statistics are from Africa, Latin America, and parts of Asia in the

⁶¹⁶. Christopher J. H. Wright, comments on the back cover of Craig Ott and Harold A. Netland (eds) *Globalizing Theology: Belief and Practice in an Era of World Christianity* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2006).

twentieth century.⁶¹⁷ Our point of interest is the basis for Christian identity within the historically exhibited diversity of the global church. In other words, what does it mean to express an ecclesial identity in the midst of such a diverse church?

Coherence and Diversity

In a study entitled "Culture and Coherence in Christian History", Andrew Walls proposes that between Pentecost and the twentieth century, Christianity can be divided into six phases. As Christianity has been taken across cultures "this has produced a series of Christian transformations across the centuries." This is unique among the world's religions. Hinduism, in all its long centuries of existence, has remained attached to the same cultural and geographic location, absorbing various influences but never itself being absorbed. Islam too, for all its various local expressions, remains centred on a particular culture and geographic location. Walls observes how Christianity differs:

Christianity, on the other hand, has throughout its history spread outwards, across cultural frontiers, so that each new point on the Christian circumference is a new potential Christian centre. And the very survival of Christianity as a separate faith has evidently been linked to the process of cross-cultural transmission.⁶¹⁸

The difference between Christianity and other faiths, particularly Islam, is the principle of translation, which is central to the former but absent in the latter. Christianity is able to transform itself in becoming at home in all the various cultural settings where it takes root, whereas to enter a mosque, no matter where that mosque is located, one is unmistakably

⁶¹⁷. On this see Philip Jenkins, *The Next Christendom: The Coming of Global Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); *World Christian Encyclopaedia: A Comprehensive Survey of Churches and Religions in the Modern World*, ed. David B. Barrett, George T. Kurian, and Todd M. Johnson, 2nd ed., 2 vols. (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); *Atlas of Global Christianity*, ed. Todd M. Johnson and Kenneth R. Ross (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009).

⁶¹⁸. Andrew Walls, *The Missionary Movement in Christian History* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1996), 22.

entering an Arabic world, and at some point in one's life there is the goal to actually visit the Arab peninsula for the Muslim *haji*. Walls explains:

There have been several different Christian civilisations already; there may yet be many more. The reason for this lies in the infinite translatability of the Christian faith... The Christian Scriptures... are open to translation; nay, the great Act on which Christian faith rests, the Word becoming flesh and pitching tent among us, is itself an act of translation. And this principle brings Christ to the heart of each culture where he finds acceptance...⁶¹⁹

But although historic Christianity presents a rich diversity of expression, does it not also exhibit substantial coherence? We follow a tactic of Walls here as we try to appreciate the diversity of Christianity. If we were to choose representatives of Christianity from various historical points between the first and the twenty-first centuries what would they have in common? How might we compare the Christianity of a first century Jewish Christian worshipping in the Jerusalem Temple, a Greek Council Father from the fourth century, a Celtic monk from an Irish monastery in the sixth century, a German Reformer from the sixteenth century, an nineteenth century British missionary preparing for service in China, a Pentecostal Brazilian in the twentieth century, and a twenty-first century Malay Christian worshipping in secret somewhere on the Malay Peninsula? If brought together into the same room, all would doubtless find fault with at least some aspects of each other's expression of the faith. What should be essential? A vigorous and lively debate would be guaranteed! But it would not be long before wise heads would discern commonalities because intrinsic to the faith of all the Christians throughout Christian history is "a firm coherence", a set of "convictions and responses which express themselves when Christians of any culture express their faith."⁶²⁰ Walls points to four: (1) the worship of the God of Israel; (2) the ultimate significance of Jesus of Nazareth; (3) that God is active where believers are; (4) that believers constitute a people of God transcending time and space.

⁶¹⁹. Walls, *The Missionary Movement* (1996), 23.

⁶²⁰. Walls, *The Missionary Movement* (1996), 23.

Walls adds "a small body of institutions", essentially the reading of scriptures and the use of bread, wine and water.

In sum, historic Christianity in all its diversity demonstrates coherence in the way it identifies itself with the story of Israel and uses the Hebrew Scriptures and the New Testament as its rule and guide. Further, at the centre of whatever transformations of authentic Christianity one might care to examine across the centuries there stands the figure of Jesus of Nazareth, worshipped as unique Saviour and Lord of the world. Jesus' Lordship challenges and transforms every worldview into which the gospel is sown. Believers articulate his significance using every cultural and linguistic form available, and where this is exhausted they creatively contextualise while remaining faithful to the apostolic testimony.

One of the most important benefits to understanding Christian identity rooted in Abraham is the coherence and continuity it provides with the people of God in history. Christians stand in continuity with Abraham, their spiritual ancestor, with ancient Israel and with the renewed, redefined people of God made possible through the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Genesis 12:1-3 sets the scene for the Old Testament's messianic hope which is thoroughly universal, pointing forward to an incorporation of nations into the people of God. In Acts 15:12-19, James turns to Amos 9:11-12 to provide a basis for understanding why and how Gentiles are to follow Messiah Jesus. The emphasis in Amos 9:12 is on incorporation and looks forward to that time when *all the nations are called by my name*. The phrase, "called by my name", is associated with marriage in Isaiah 4:1, and captures a sense of intimacy and unity.⁶²¹ It can be found in various other contexts in the Old

⁶²¹ See Alec Motyer, *Amos Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: IVP, 1974), 204.

Testament, with the same meaning.⁶²² This intimacy and oneness applied to the nations in Amos 9 finds its New Testament fulfilment in Ephesians 3:6 where *the Gentiles are fellow heirs, members of the same body, and partakers of the promise in Christ Jesus through the gospel*. Here we find the combined dimensions of Christian identity - the historical, relational and ecclesial summed up in one verse.

To return to the theme of coherence, and in connection with the ecclesial dimensions of identity, it is important to emphasise that translatability is intrinsic to Christianity. It has enabled Christian community to develop and be expressed in a wide variety of cultural contexts. We can trace many of these expressions throughout the history of the church and while seeing incredible diversity, we can also distinguish beliefs, principles and themes which have remained at the core of each expression of authentic Christianity and provided that underlying coherence to all the transformations of Christianity discernible across the centuries. The promise to Abraham, that in him all the families of the earth would be blessed, is a promise with the expectation of diversity built into it from the start, and yet, a diversity that would bring about a profound integration and unity, where "Abraham would be the ancestor of all who believe" and that all who believe, without relinquishing all their rich diversity would, as Ephesians 4 pictures it, grow together into a full grown humanity. Paul, the apostle to the Gentiles, was thrilled to see Gentiles believing the gospel and living under the Lordship of Christ. But what takes centre stage in Ephesians is the fact that in the gospel Jew and Gentile believers are now one people, God's new humanity. We will take this further in the following pages, but this creation of a new humanity is essentially about *identity* being recreated in Christ. It would not be long until the church became predominantly Gentile, but as Walls points out, "for a few brief years, the one-made-out-

⁶²² See Genesis 48:16; Deuteronomy 28:9, 10; Jeremiah 15:16; 1 Kings 8:43.

of-two was visibly demonstrated, the middle wall of partition was down, the irreconcilables were reconciled."⁶²³ This was not a one-off historical event, but a paradigm for the way Christian mission is to understand itself: *that now through the church, the manifold wisdom of God should be made known* (Eph 3:10). What Paul saw in the context of Jew and Gentile, the church is to expect to see in various contexts of division and among hostile ethnicities. Walls describes how Christian identity is shaped when Christ's Lordship is extended over our cultural diversity, and we humbly recognise what being reconciled to Christ means for our relationships with others:

It is repeated as people separated by language, history and culture recognise each other in Christ. And the recognition is not based on one adopting the ways of thought and behaviour and expression, however sanctified, of the other; that is Judaizing, and another Gospel. Christ must rule in the minds of his people; which means extending his dominion over those corporate structures of thought that constitute a culture. The very act of doing so must sharpen the identity of those who share a culture. The faith of Christ is infinitely translatable, it creates 'a place to feel at home.' But it must not make a place where we are so much at home that no one else can live there. Here we have no abiding city. In Christ all poor sinners meet, and in finding themselves reconciled with him, are reconciled to each other.⁶²⁴

God's Pilgrim People

The phrase, "we have no abiding city", takes us to the theme of God's pilgrim people.

Christian faith has always had that sense of pilgrimage, of departure, of exodus. Volf uses the picture of departure to illustrate this aspect of Christian identity:

Much like Jews and Muslims, Christians can never be first of all Asians or Americans, Croatians, Russians, or Tutsis, and then Christians. At the very core of Christian identity lies an all-encompassing change of loyalty, from a given culture with its gods to the God of all cultures. A response to a call from that God entails rearrangement of a whole network of allegiances... Departure is part and parcel of Christian identity.⁶²⁵

⁶²³. Walls, *The Christian Movement* (1996), 25.

⁶²⁴. Ibid, 25.

⁶²⁵. Volf, *Exclusion and Embrace* (1996), 40.

A Christian identity rooted in Abraham is a counter-cultural identity. Volf describes it in terms of departure. In Abraham's day, as in many modern cultural contexts, the identity of an individual was bound up with ties to tribe, clan and household (cf. Judges 6:15). These were the relationships that fundamentally defined the individual. To divorce oneself from these relationships, or to be forced, because of disease or persecution, to abandon one's family and people, was unthinkable. For Abraham to consider leaving his country, kindred and father's house was to depart from those relationships which defined him. To be a blessing, however, it would be impossible for him to remain. Abraham chose to depart and in doing so allowed his identity to be redefined by his obedience to the call of God and by his life of faith in the promise of God: "by faith he made his home in the promised land like a stranger in a foreign country" (Hebrews 11:9). This "courage to break his cultural and familial ties and abandon the gods of his ancestors (Joshua 24:2) out of allegiance to a God of all families and all cultures was the original Abrahamic revolution."⁶²⁶ There is, writes Peskett, "an alternative call to loneliness" which must be faced by those who profess to follow Christ: "a going against the tide", a "swimming against the stream", a "separation from the crowd."⁶²⁷ The idea of being a stranger and an alien in this world was part of the self-understanding of the early Christians who, in 1 Peter 2:11, are described as *paroikoi* - resident aliens - "at home everywhere, but settled nowhere."⁶²⁸ This is an identity which rejects any form of withdrawal from the world whether in "judgmental isolation" or "protective separation",⁶²⁹ but instead affirms a lifestyle which is both counter-cultural and

⁶²⁶. Ibid, 39.

⁶²⁷. Peskett, *The Message of Mission*, 104.

⁶²⁸. Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 226.

⁶²⁹. See Eddie Gibbs and Ian Coffey, *Church Next: Quantum Changes in Christian Ministry* (Leicester: IVP, 2001), 46.

committed to missionary engagement. Ramachandra illustrates this from the mission of the early Christians:

The complex plurality of cultural forms was upheld as linguistic and other cultural resources were rummaged for tools through which the message of Jesus could be conveyed. No cultures were inherently unclean, and none was absolutized in its particularity. All cultures in their distinctiveness could serve the one God's unfolding purpose for human life. Tribal self-awareness became a frontier in the course of the gospel, but tribalism itself was sabotaged.⁶³⁰

The Christian church as resident alien is a theme included by David Bosch in his presentation of an "emerging missionary ecclesiology."⁶³¹ "God's pilgrim people"⁶³² is a concept which figures prominently in the Papal Encyclicals of *Lumen Gentium*⁶³³ and *Ad Gentes*.⁶³⁴ In Protestantism, Bosch identifies it as significant in the discussions of the International Missionary Council at Willingen in 1952. But more than that, it is part and parcel of what it means to be church because "to be a pilgrim in the world belongs intrinsically to the church's ex-centric position."⁶³⁵ The church is "ek-klesia, 'called out' of the world, and sent back into the world."⁶³⁶ It is in this creative tension that the church's mission is carried forward. And creative tension across a range of areas was, for Bosch, a key insight as to how mission will proceed through what he saw as an emerging paradigm shift. "In the field of religion," writes Bosch, "a paradigm shift always means both continuity and change, both faithfulness to the past and boldness to engage the future, both constancy and contingency, both tradition and transformation... it is only within the force

⁶³⁰. Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 226-227.

⁶³¹. David Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 372.

⁶³². *Ibid*, 373.

⁶³³. Dogmatic Constitution on the Church (Vatican II).

⁶³⁴. Decree on the Church's Missionary Activity (Vatican II).

⁶³⁵. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 373.

⁶³⁶. *Ibid*, 373.

field of apparent opposites that we shall begin to approximate a way of theologising for our own time in a meaningful way."⁶³⁷ It is in this tension of being called out of the world and sent back into the world that the church realises its true identity - as pilgrim and therefore missionary. Carl Braaten argues persuasively in this direction:

A church with an identity crisis can do no missionary good. But its true identity is precisely a missionary one. The church's identity does not lie in itself. It can only find itself by losing itself and define itself while being *en route*. It is always in an eccentric position. Nor can the church live merely by reproducing its own traditions. Hence, there must always be something foreign about its mission. It must risk the security of every established identity by being open to new things, practicing creative freedom, experimenting with new possibilities, and entering upon foreign situations. Foreignness is an element of the church's constitution; staying at home is for those in retirement.⁶³⁸

There is, therefore, a distinctiveness attached to the Christian church as 'stranger', 'alien' and 'exile' in this world. But this identity is configured in the New Testament in such a way that it empowers and sustains followers of Christ to be committed to this world because they are sent into it with the incarnational life of Christ as their supreme example and the blessing of the nations as their motivation.

Identity and Peace

Arguably the most significant passage in the New Testament to speak about identity and peace in an ecclesiological context is Ephesians 2:11-22. Klyne Snodgrass has described it as "perhaps the most significant ecclesiological text in the New Testament".⁶³⁹ In chapter one of this thesis we noted the importance of the letter to the Ephesians for understanding the doctrine of reconciliation. Our aim in that chapter was to draw out both the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the doctrine of reconciliation, giving emphasis to its social

⁶³⁷. Ibid, 366, 367.

⁶³⁸. Carl E. Braaten, *The Flaming Centre: A Theology of the Christian Mission* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 55-56.

⁶³⁹. Klyne Snodgrass, *Ephesians: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1996), 123, quoted in O'Brien, *The Letter to the Ephesians, The Pillar New Testament Commentary* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge / Leicester: Eerdmans / Apollos, 1999), 183.

implications. Both dimensions of the doctrine are treated in Ephesians 2, and it is difficult to separate them because to speak of one is to speak of the other. Even so, this is surely the clearest passage in the New Testament for understanding the horizontal dimensions of Christ's reconciling work. The force of the passage, however, transcends the vertical-horizontal categories and takes us to the question of identity. In this final chapter we are building on what was presented in chapter one by recognising a fundamental transformation of identity with wide-ranging implications, especially in the area of peacemaking. Although he does not develop it explicitly, Peter O'Brien's comments on the passage assist us in seeing the importance of the theme of identity in a number of ways. For instance, when he writes about continuity and discontinuity. Gentile Christians stand now in continuity with the promises of God to Israel (cf. Gen. 12:1-3; Is. 49:5, 6). But the emphasis in 2:11-22 is mostly on the side of discontinuity because "the new community of which these Gentiles have become a part is not simply a development out of Israel. It is a new creation... not some kind of amalgam made out of the best elements of Israel and the Gentiles. The resulting new humanity transcends the two old entities, even though unbelieving Israel and disobedient Gentiles continue to exist."⁶⁴⁰ The author of Ephesians contrasts the past and present using a 'once-now' schema, particularly in verses 11-13 and 19.⁶⁴¹ The dramatic change of identity is signalled in verse 13, "But now in Christ Jesus". Before this there was a Jewish identity, with all its attending privileges, and there was a Gentile identity which stood outside the promises of God, with no privileges. But now, in Christ, the Jew and the Gentile become one in Christ. This is clear in Galatians 3:28 - "There is neither Jew nor Greek..." - both now have a new identity. In contrast to their previously alienated, separated position, the Gentile readers of Paul's letter have been

⁶⁴⁰. O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 184.

⁶⁴¹. See O'Brien, *Ephesians*, pages 182-221.

"brought near", through the cross-work of Christ. This does not mean that Gentile Christians have been incorporated into the commonwealth of Israel, but rather, they have become members of "a newly created community which transcends Israel and its privileges and where Gentiles, along with Jews, are on an equal footing."⁶⁴² Ephesians 2 contains a number of allusions to Old Testament passages, perhaps most clearly to those which focus on the topic of peace. When Paul writes that "he himself is our peace" do we not think of Isaiah 9:6 and the messianic title of "the Prince of Peace"? For both Jewish and Gentile believers, "Christ is the embodiment of peace" who makes possible the unity of Jewish and Gentile Christians. The Prince of Peace has brought these two hostile groups "into a mutual relationship and a unity which surpasses what they once were."⁶⁴³ The first century world, from the Jewish perspective, was riven by the twofold division between Jew and Gentile. Paul, according to 1 Corinthians 10:32 makes it a threefold division: "Jews, Greeks, and the church of God." This "third race" is a unique creation of the gospel of Christ.⁶⁴⁴

Christ has made this unity possible by breaking down "in his flesh the dividing wall of hostility." This "dividing wall" was the Mosaic law - a religious and sociological barrier which separated Jews from Gentiles. From the Jewish point of view this separateness was celebrated as a form of superiority. But the death of Christ has broken down that "dividing wall" and the result is a "new humanity... reconciled to God in one body through the cross" (2:15ff). The cross of Christ has effected peace - Jew and Gentile are made one - restored in relationship to both God and one another. These two deeply divided groups are created

⁶⁴². Ibid, 191.

⁶⁴³. Ibid, 194.

⁶⁴⁴. References to a "third race" or "new race" are found in Clement, *Stromateis* 6.5.41.6 and *Epistle to Diognetus* 1, and cited in O'Brien, *Ephesians*, 195.

in one new person and it is important that we see this not simply as a new combination but a new creation that transcended the deep division between Jew and Gentile. Gentiles have not been made into Jews, nor Jews into Gentiles. Neither is it an amalgamation of the best of Jew and Gentile worlds, but a 'new humanity', transcending the old entities and made possible by the grace of God. The gift of a new identity means that 'Jew' and 'Gentile' now function as adjectives. They are *Jewish* Christians and *Gentile* Christians. We have here not only the transcending of old entities but the transference of a new identity - there is now "one new man in place of the two." The Jewish Christian does not think of himself as a Jew first and foremost. The Gentile Christian likewise has to rethink her identity. The labels of ethnicity no longer define identity. This has implications for Christian self-identity and peacemaking in the twenty-first century. Identity transferred by grace, in love, nullifies all attempts to self-construct identity on the basis of human achievement or worldly power. The breaking down of the "dividing wall" and the establishing of the "new humanity" - this is something only God could do. Human effort contributes nothing. The dividing wall in Paul's context was "the law with its commandments and ordinances" (2:15). Jewish self-identity was largely bound up with the keeping of the law, which functioned as the key boundary marker and identity maker for Jewish communities. Those who did not keep the law were looked down upon by those who did. Therefore, the gospel of reconciliation, with its accompanying transformation and transference of identity, together with its resulting peace, was a profound challenge to any Jew whose self-identity was rooted in the boundary markers contained in the Mosaic law. Ramachandra draws out the contemporary challenge of this for Christian communities today:

we could say in general that if our self-identity is rooted in anything we *possess*, whether it be our racial or cultural heritage, educational ability, theological scholarship, wealth, social prestige, religious devotion, 'meritorious works', political power, moral achievements, or whatever, that identity will always divide us from others who lack that particular possession... Thus it is that 'law' must be abolished as a means of human self-identity if true reconciliation between God and

humankind and within humankind can be realised.⁶⁴⁵

There is a strong connection therefore between identity and peacemaking. We receive our identity as a gift from God, and that is liberating because it sets us free to be who God created us to be. And by implication, and we see this in Ephesians 2, our identity is given in love, for it is "through the cross" that Christians are made "members of the household of God" (2:19). Christian identity is not abstract but practical, concrete and essentially relational. This identity which is given in love restores one's relationship to God and simultaneously with one's neighbour. "This" writes Ramachandra, "is the logic of the cross: the very act that binds me to God in grace binds me, *simultaneously*, to my neighbour in acceptance."⁶⁴⁶ In his book *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World*, Miroslav Volf explores this core thought of our identity being given and shaped in love and the profound impact this has on our relationships with others. Volf bases his perspective on some words of Martin Luther in his treatise *The Freedom of the Christian*:

a Christian lives not in himself, but in Christ and in his neighbour. Otherwise he is not a Christian. He lives in Christ through faith, in his neighbour through love. By faith he is caught up beyond himself into God. By love he descends beneath himself into his neighbour. Yet he always remains in God and in his love."⁶⁴⁷

Volf is principally concerned about how a sense of personal identity can be maintained and not violated by wrongs suffered in the past. His commentary on Luther is illuminating for our own discussion on identity:

Behind his [Luther's] account of how God saves human beings lies his account of who human beings are. We are neither made nor unmade by what we do or by what others do to us. The heart of our identity lies not in our hands, but in God's hands. We are most properly ourselves because God is in us and we are in God. No doubt,

⁶⁴⁵. Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 267.

⁶⁴⁶. Ibid, 267.

⁶⁴⁷. Martin Luther, *The Freedom of a Christian*, in vol. 31, *Luther's Works*, 371, in Miroslav Volf, *The End of Memory: Remembering Rightly in a Violent World* (Grand Rapids / Cambridge: Eerdmans, 2006), 198.

what we or others have inscribed onto our souls and bodies marks us and helps us shape who we are. Yet it has no power to define us. God's love for us, indeed God's presence in us and our being "caught up beyond" ourselves and being placed "into God" most fundamentally defines us as human beings and as individuals.⁶⁴⁸

A secure Christian identity is rooted in the understanding that our identity is given and anchored in love, and such an identity shapes peace in relation to our neighbour. An identity based on anything else becomes a source of division and strife. If we reject the identity God offers, those defining things - "Language, Culture, Religion, Education, Science... all these, while either neutral or good in themselves, become causes of human division whenever they are sources of human identity."⁶⁴⁹

The paragraph of Ephesians 2:11-22 concludes with Paul's use of three portraits of God's new humanity, illustrating what this change of identity means. Three metaphors are gathered - from the world of politics, the family, and the temple. So the new community in Christ are pictured in verses 19-22 as "God's kingdom, God's family, and God's Temple."⁶⁵⁰ There are relational dimensions to all three but none more so than those associated with the realm of the family. The household metaphor was a vivid and powerful one, speaking to Paul's first readers of what it meant to be part of a community that provided "a sense of identity, belonging and protection."⁶⁵¹

Here then is a way of understanding how a historic sense of identity in Abraham can ground a healthy, missional Christian identity and lifestyle for today's contemporary

⁶⁴⁸. Volf, *The End of Memory*, 199.

⁶⁴⁹. Ramachandra, *Recovery of Mission*, 266.

⁶⁵⁰. John R. Stott, *Ephesians*, *The Bible Speaks Today* (Leicester: IVP, 1979), 104.

⁶⁵¹. P. H. Towner, "Households and Household Codes" in *Dictionary of Paul and His Letters*, eds. Gerald F. Hawthorne and Ralph P. Martin (Leicester: IVP, 1993), 418.

church. In the gospel, a new way of being human has been established. Jews and Gentiles who came together in Christ saw themselves as a 'third race' - neither Jew nor Gentile. Their primary identity was found in the new community they had become part of - the body of Christ - whose social and cultural inclusiveness was unprecedented. And although they were a marginal and often despised group within the Roman Empire, the early Christians lived out this identity with a clear vision of Christ's lordship encompassing the entire empire, understanding themselves as the community through whom God would bring about the hope of renewal and global peace.

Bonhoeffer's Perspectives on Identity and Peace

In this final section of our closing chapter we are turning to Dietrich Bonhoeffer. This thesis, especially in chapter four, has given considerable space to the works of Asian theologians and church leaders in Malaysia. And rightly so. But in Bonhoeffer we find perspectives on the themes of identity and peace which are particularly helpful in bringing this thesis to its conclusion.

Having ended our focus on the ecclesial dimension of Christian identity with a look at the importance of Ephesians 2, it is apt that we begin this final part with words of Bonhoeffer on that very passage:

A Christian comes to others only through Jesus Christ. Among men there is strife. "He is our peace," says Paul of Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:14). Without Christ there is discord between God and man and between man and man. Christ became the Mediator and made peace with God and among men. Without Christ we should not know God, we could not call upon Him, nor come to him. But without Christ we also would not know our brother, nor could we come to him. The way is blocked by our own ego. Christ opened up the way to God and to our brother. Now Christians can live with one another in peace; they can love and serve one another; they can become one.⁶⁵²

⁶⁵². Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Life Together* (New York: Harper Collins, 1954), 23-24.

In this quotation we find the themes of identity, peace, and community, themes which are prominent in the works of Bonhoeffer. There have been scattered references to the German theologian in chapters one and four of this thesis, but readers may still ask why we allow him the final word in this concluding chapter. In what sense, in a thesis concerned with the church in Malaysia, is a theologian from a different cultural context and historical era relevant to the challenges facing churches in Malaysia? A number of reasons underline the appropriateness of drawing from Bonhoeffer.

We are in no way attempting a systematic analysis of Bonhoeffer. We shall hone in on those areas of his thought which are of special use to us in considering the themes of identity and peacemaking. We agree with Stephen Plant that "not all of Dietrich Bonhoeffer's theology is equally helpful but enough of it points forward to make him a good companion and guide on the Christian journey."⁶⁵³ Indeed, it seems that an increasing number of people are taking him as their guide, and Plant notes "the recent resurgence of interest in Bonhoeffer in churches and among students."⁶⁵⁴

Bonhoeffer's influence has not been limited to the West. Stephen Haynes has surveyed the evidence for Bonhoeffer's influence on liberationist thought in Asia, especially in India, Japan and Korea. For instance, in comments made by the South Korea theologian Chung Hyun Kyung, Bonhoeffer is described as "the major theological mentor" to the Korean Student Christian movement, "not because we understood the details and nuances of [his]

⁶⁵³. Stephen Plant, *Bonhoeffer* (London / New York: Continuum, 2004), ix.

⁶⁵⁴. Plant, *Bonhoeffer*, ix.

theology but because we were inspired by [his] life story."⁶⁵⁵ And among the various

portraits that Haynes presents is one of Bonhoeffer the "Agent of Reconciliation".

In a world of hyperconscious racial and ethnic antagonisms, Bonhoeffer's contemporary 'message' is naturally extended to the challenge of reconciling peoples. Indeed, a prominent aspect of Bonhoeffer's universal portrait is his willingness to transgress barriers of kith and kin to speak out on behalf of the oppressed other... he serves as a guide for those concerned with the reconciliation of peoples.⁶⁵⁶

So we find that Bonhoeffer's influence has extended beyond Germany to various parts of Asia. His influence has not, as yet, been substantial in Malaysia, though we note that Ng Kam Weng has a chapter entitled "Transforming Spirituality: Bonhoefferian Perspectives" in his book *Bridge Building*. But it is Bonhoeffer's relevance for Christian thinking about identity and peace that we want to draw special attention to. One has only to survey the literature on Bonhoeffer to see how influential his thought has been in places such as South Africa, Poland, and the United States.⁶⁵⁷

Bonhoeffer's biography is well-known: scholar, pastor, ecumenical leader, seminary director, conspirator, prisoner, martyr. His deeply pacific orientation is clear from the events in which he chose to participate and the emphases he gave in his various works. In

⁶⁵⁵. Chung Hyun Kyung, quoted in Stephen R. Haynes, *The Bonhoeffer Phenomenon: Portraits of a Protestant Saint* (London: SCM, 2004), 51. See also Haynes' brief paragraph on the influence of Bonhoeffer on the church in Japan. Bonhoeffer is credited with helping Japanese Christian thinkers develop theologies "from below", such as liberation theology and Minjung theology. Japanese theologian Hiroshi Murakamai "charged Japanese Christians to recognise that 'behind the prosperity which Japan enjoys today there is much discrimination and oppression.' The Japanese church cannot sing Gregorian chants... with eyes closed to the plight of minority groups within Japan, neocolonial structures, pollution, or sex tourism." Haynes, *Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 52.

⁶⁵⁶. Haynes, *Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 111; 114.

⁶⁵⁷. For application of Bonhoeffer's thought to the South African context of apartheid see the works of John W. De Gruchy, notably *Bonhoeffer and South Africa: Theology in Dialogue* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans 1984); and applied to the racial divisions between black and white in the United States see for instance Josiah Ulysses Young, *No Difference in the Fare: Dietrich Bonhoeffer and the Problem of Racism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998).

August 1934, Bonhoeffer participated at an ecumenical conference on Fano Island, Denmark. There he presented a paper and preached a sermon on the church proclaiming "peace as a concrete command of God." At a time when Nazism was casting its dark shadow over Europe and just three months after the Barmen Synod, Bonhoeffer was asked at the Denmark ecumenical conference what he would do if war broke out. He replied: "I pray that God will give me the strength not to take up arms."⁶⁵⁸ In his work *The Cost of Discipleship*, Bonhoeffer's leanings towards a pacific stance are clear. The Sermon of the Mount was influential in his thinking about peace. Indeed, it could be said to mark a turning point in Bonhoeffer's life.⁶⁵⁹ But on the question of peace we take note of an encounter with Jean Lasserre in New York during 1930-31. Bethge comments on this: "Not that Bonhoeffer immediately became a convinced pacifist - in fact he never did so - but after meeting Lasserre the question of the concrete answer to the biblical injunction of peace and that of the concrete steps to be taken against warlike impulses never left him again."⁶⁶⁰ In *The Cost of Discipleship* Bonhoeffer has this to say:

The followers of Jesus have been called to peace. When he called them they found their peace, for he is their peace. But now they are told that they must not only have peace but make it. And to that end they renounce all violence and tumult. In the cause of Christ nothing is to be gained by such methods... his disciples keep the peace by choosing to endure suffering themselves rather than inflict it on others.⁶⁶¹

⁶⁵⁸. Cited in Keith Clements, *A Patriotism for Today: love of country in dialogue with the witness of Dietrich Bonhoeffer* (London: Collins, 1986), 28. The Barmen Synod was held 29-31 May, 1934 and the Ecumenical Conference at Fano, Denmark took place 24-30 August, 1934. F. Burton Nelson has described 1934 as the "pivotal year of the church struggle" in his article "'Christian Confrontations with the Holocaust' 1934: Pivotal Year of the Church Struggle" *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* Vol. 4, no. 3, 283-297 (1989).

⁶⁵⁹. In the definitive biography of Bonhoeffer, the section looking at the impact on Bonhoeffer of his study of the Sermon on the Mount is entitled "The Transition from Theologian to Christian". Eberhard Bethge, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: A Biography* revised edition (Augsburg: Fortress Publishers, 2000), 202.

⁶⁶⁰. Cited in Clements, *A Patriotism for Today*, 114.

⁶⁶¹. Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship*, 102.

Clements has commented that for Bonhoeffer peace "is concretised in the church of Christ, transcending all national and racial boundaries which are relativised under Christ."⁶⁶²

Other influences on Bonhoeffer's thinking should also be noted. For instance, while studying at the Union Theological Seminary in New York in 1930, Bonhoeffer became attached to Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem. Working there among black youth and participating in the worship of the church Bonhoeffer found ideas he had written about in his *Communio Sanctorum* fleshed out in this church community.⁶⁶³ Also significant - and no doubt tied to his study of the Sermon on the Mount - was Bonhoeffer's desire to visit Gandhi - a goal that was never realised. In light of all the evidence which marks out Bonhoeffer's thought along clearly pacific lines, many have found his eventual decision to take up arms hugely controversial. In his analysis of Bonhoeffer's actions Keith Clements emphasises that Bonhoeffer "was no starry eyed idealist yearning for peace at any price... He is providing one illustration of the perennial paradox of life, that we are only likely to reach a good, when we aim for an even greater good."⁶⁶⁴ Clements understands Bonhoeffer as a true patriot who saw that if truth and justice were to be prerequisites for peace such a stance would require

not the abandonment of one's nation for the sake of some as yet undefined 'total community', but a deep and sober identification with one's nation in the context of the search for that greater community. One cannot simply jump out of the tensions of the situation between one's own and other peoples, into an abstract realm above them. Truth and justice are not abstract principles, but the truth of a particular situation and the justice for a particular people in a specific place and time. The struggle for truth and justice therefore demands identification with one's people, either in their liberation from injustice and oppression, or in the responsibility of

⁶⁶². Clements, *A Patriotism for Today*, 121.

⁶⁶³. Cf. Haynes, *Bonhoeffer Phenomenon*, 113-114. It has been suggested that the black church's influence on Bonhoeffer's theology can be seen in his use of phrases such as "cheap grace" and "world come of age" - phrases believed to have been used by Abyssinian church pastor Adam Clayton Powell Sr.

⁶⁶⁴. Clements, *A Patriotism for Today*, 118.

exposing and bearing their guilt if they are in any way the oppressors or exploiters. There is therefore a powerful sense in which the cause of peace demands a truly 'patriotic' loyalty. Bonhoeffer's courage in naming struggle alongside peace as an order of preservation must be taken seriously by any who today would see themselves as part of a 'peace-movement'.

For Christians living in the complexities of conflict, Bonhoeffer therefore provides a rich mine of resources, both in the pattern of his life and in the content of his theology. And it is the very synchronisation of Bonhoeffer's life with his theology that makes him such a powerful example for those searching for authenticity of life and witness. And there are those who believe Bonhoeffer's full impact has yet to be felt - particularly among evangelicals. We will not here judge the merits or otherwise of the claim, but Georg Huntemann's assertion deserves to be heard:

[Bonhoeffer] is a theologian of an era that has not yet begun in theology or the church... very close in spirit to the evangelicals... He will be their church father in the future - or else evangelicals will have no future. Bonhoeffer is in fact so similar to the evangelicals that it will become uncomfortable for them. For Bonhoeffer's theology could bring the necessary catharsis for the "evangelicals of all lands."⁶⁶⁵

In Bonhoeffer we find a man caught up "in the tension between his faith and culture" and yet able to maintain "his integrity despite the complexity of the situations he faced."⁶⁶⁶ The example of Bonhoeffer's life, together with his writings, helps us to see that it is the integration of the self that produces an ethos of peace and a life of integrity which becomes particularly evident in times of crisis, strife and tension. The ethos of the peacemaker is embedded in the person, and in the Christian community who understand the new identity given to them by Christ. In situations of tension and complexity the need is for integration, reconciliation, peace. To understand this further we go to Bonhoeffer's *Ethics*.

⁶⁶⁵. Georg Huntemann, *Dietrich Bonhoeffer: An Evangelical Reassessment* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1996), 12.

⁶⁶⁶. Alister McGrath, *Christian Spirituality* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1999), 23.

In the *Ethics* Bonhoeffer says that the knowledge of good and evil is not the starting point of the task of Christian ethics: "The knowledge of good and evil seems to be the aim of all ethical reflection. The first task of Christian ethics is to invalidate this knowledge." Rather, such knowledge is already a clear indication of the profound problem facing humankind: "...Christian ethics claims to discuss the origin of the whole problem of ethics, and thus professes to be a critique of all ethics simply as ethics." The knowledge of good and evil was never the intention by God in creating humankind. In the beginning, at his origin, "Man... knows only one thing: God. It is only in the unity of his knowledge of God that he knows of other men, of things, and of himself. He knows all things only in God, and God in all things."⁶⁶⁷ Knowing good and evil is evidence of disunion, of disintegration. "Man knows good and evil against God, against his origin, godlessly and of his own choice, understanding himself according to his own contrary possibilities; and he is cut off from the unifying, reconciling life in God."⁶⁶⁸ Having been created to know the good alone, humankind has been plunged into a deep division - a *disintegration*, in which they must weigh good and evil and choose between them - a task they were never in the first place created for and one they are consistently incapable of carrying out. Consequently, "Man's life is now disunion with God, with men, with things, and with himself... Man is in a state of disunion with his origin."⁶⁶⁹ Disintegration, then, characterises every level of relationship.

And thus, for man who is in disunion with God, all things are in disunion, what is and what should be, life and law, knowledge and action, idea and reality, reason and instinct, duty and inclination, conviction and advantage, necessity and freedom, exertion and genius, universal and concrete, individual and collective; even truth, justice, beauty and love come into opposition with one another, just as do pleasure and displeasure, happiness and sorrow. One could prolong the list still further and the course of human history adds to it constantly. All these disunions are varieties

⁶⁶⁷. In early editions of *Ethics* these were the opening lines. *Ethics*, 3.

⁶⁶⁸. Ibid, 5.

⁶⁶⁹. Ibid, 5, 9.

of the disunion in the knowledge of good and evil.⁶⁷⁰

Bonhoeffer's phrase - "Man's... disunion with his origin" - we can understand as the disintegration of the self, or more simply - the individual's loss of true identity. This is the source of all other conflict, and the remedy, therefore, is the rediscovery of unity and reconciliation and the integration of the self. Read the New Testament, says Bonhoeffer, for there we find examples of people whose lives and actions are "not all problematic or tormented or dark: [they are] self-evident, joyful, sure and clear."⁶⁷¹ And the supreme example is Jesus himself. Jesus knows only the good and is completely free to always choose the good. To illustrate this, Bonhoeffer contrasts the Pharisees with Jesus. The former are the picture of disunion: "For the Pharisee every moment of life becomes a situation of conflict in which he has to choose between good and evil. For the sake of avoiding any lapse his entire thought is strenuously devoted night and day to the anticipation of the whole immense range of possible conflicts, to the reaching of a decision in these conflicts, and to the determination of his own choice."⁶⁷² And into these conflicts the Pharisees try to draw Jesus, but without success, for "with each of his answers he simply leaves the case of conflict beneath him."⁶⁷³ There is a world of difference between the two:

Just as the Pharisees' question and temptation arises from the disunion of the knowledge of good and evil, so, too, Jesus's answer arises from unity with God, with the origin, and from the overcoming of the disunion of man with God. The Pharisees and Jesus are speaking on totally different levels.⁶⁷⁴

And if we search the New Testament we will not find a single situation where Jesus is drawn in to a conflict and provides an either-or response. He never takes on the role of

⁶⁷⁰. *Ethics*, 11.

⁶⁷¹. *Ibid*, 11.

⁶⁷². *Ibid*, 12.

⁶⁷³. *Ibid*, 13.

⁶⁷⁴. *Ibid*, 13.

"arbiter in vital questions; he refuses to be held by human alternatives."⁶⁷⁵ The freedom we see in Jesus is the freedom to always pursue the will of God. There is a simplicity and consistency of obedience to the whole of Jesus' life, and in him we find the route to recovering our own sense of identity. It is worth quoting Bonhoeffer at length here:

no one can discern in Jesus the uncertainty and the timidity of one who acts arbitrarily, but His freedom gives to Him and to His followers in all their actions a peculiar quality of sureness, unquestionableness and radiance, the quality of what is overcome and of what overcomes. The freedom of Jesus is not the arbitrary choice of one amongst innumerable possibilities; it consists on the contrary precisely in the complete simplicity of His action, which is never confronted by a plurality of possibilities, conflicts or alternatives, but always only by one thing. This one thing Jesus calls the will of God. He says that to do this will is his meat. This will of God is his life. He lives and acts not by the knowledge of good and evil by the will of God. There is only one will of God. In it the origin is recovered; in it there is established the freedom and the simplicity of all action.⁶⁷⁶

By accepting and living in pursuit of the will of God "the origin is recovered."

Reconciliation replaces disunion, freedom and unity overcome the conflicting choices between good and evil. "For in knowing Christ man knows and acknowledges God's choice which has fallen upon this man himself; he no longer stands as the chooser between good and evil, that is to say, in disunion; he is the chosen one, who can no longer choose, but has already made his choice in his being chosen in the freedom and unity of the deed and will of God."⁶⁷⁷ When an individual accepts the identity recreated and transferred to them in Christ, then the will of God becomes the integrating factor, the primary orientation for life, making possible the integration of the self and a total outlook characterised by an ethos of peace. For at its root, this is an identity of peaceableness which shapes peacemakers, who in turn shape communities of peace. And this new identity which integrates the individual, is shaped and formed not in isolation, but in relationship with other followers of Christ from other backgrounds, cultures and nations.

⁶⁷⁵. Ibid, 14.

⁶⁷⁶. Ibid, 15.

⁶⁷⁷. Ibid, 18.

Jesus Christ gives us our identity and that identity is formed as we are integrated with others in the church. Christian identity, as explored above, is essentially an ecclesial identity. This thesis is interested in exploring the social implications of the gospel in the context of Malaysia. But we are here turning from the social to the individual realm because having turned the spotlight on the theme of identity we are concerning ourselves with the individual. Bonhoeffer has never been accused of indifference towards social issues and yet he identifies the integration of the self, the recovery of the individual's true human identity, as the key to Christian ethics and peacemaking. Human identity - "to be a real man", Bonhoeffer insists, is "to be conformed to the Incarnate..." and this is the key to social transformation. "It is not Christian men who shape the world with their ideas, but it is Christ who shapes men in conformity with Himself."⁶⁷⁸ The Scriptures are concerned "not with the forming of a world by means of plans and programmes" but rather "with the one form which has overcome the world, the form of Jesus Christ."⁶⁷⁹ The world is shaped not by Christians teaching abstract values: "It is not by ideals and programmes or by conscience, duty, responsibility and virtue that reality can be confronted and overcome, but simply and solely by the perfect love of God... it is not by a general idea of love that this is achieved, but by the really *lived* love of God in Jesus Christ."⁶⁸⁰ And such love does not withdraw from the world but "experiences and suffers the reality of the world in all its hardness. The world exhausts its fury against the body of Christ. But, tormented, He forgives the world its sin. That is how the reconciliation is accomplished. *Ecce homo!*"⁶⁸¹ There is nothing abstract about Christian ethics. For Bonhoeffer it involves the living

⁶⁷⁸. *Ethics*, 61.

⁶⁷⁹. *Ibid*, 61.

⁶⁸⁰. *Ibid*, 52.

⁶⁸¹. *Ibid*, 52.

reality of "being drawn into the form of Jesus Christ... as *conformation* with the unique form of Him who was made man, was crucified, and rose again."⁶⁸² The truly human community, the place where identity is shaped and sustained, is the church - the Body of Christ.

The Church is the man in Christ, incarnate, sentenced and awakened to new life. In the first instance, therefore, she has essentially nothing whatever to do with the so-called religious functions of man, but with the whole man in his existence in the world with all its implications. What matters in the Church is not religion but the form of Christ, and its taking form amidst a band of men. If we allow ourselves to lose sight of this, even for an instant, we inevitably relapse into that programme-planning for the ethical or religious shaping of the world, which was where we set out from.⁶⁸³

As the church takes the form of Christ, lives under the exclusive lordship of Christ, and pursues the will of God, so transformation takes place in the wider world. Words quoted from Bonhoeffer earlier in the thesis deserve another hearing: "The more exclusively we acknowledge and confess Christ as our Lord, the more fully the wide range of His dominion will be disclosed to us."⁶⁸⁴ The "wide range of his dominion" speaks of a freedom to live by the will of God, a way of living that is free from the double-mindedness and self-division which James is determined his readers should reject in place of the single-minded, integrated identity which shapes the ethos of "peacemakers who sow in peace and raise a harvest of righteousness." (James 1:8; 4:8; 3:17, 18).

The question of identity was important to Bonhoeffer from the time of his doctoral dissertation, *Sanctorum Communio*, when he explored the notion of Christ existing as community. Early on in that work he writes, "Every concept of community is essentially related to a concept of person. It is impossible to say what constitutes community without

⁶⁸². Ibid, 61.

⁶⁸³. Ibid, 64.

⁶⁸⁴. Ibid, 41.

asking what constitutes a person."⁶⁸⁵ The question of ecclesial identity then becomes a deeply personal question when he is in prison. This is illustrated with great poignancy in the poem, *Who Am I?* and its concluding lines, "Who am I? They mock me, these lonely questions of time. Whoever I am, Thou knowest, O God, I am Thine!"⁶⁸⁶ Knowing who we are is the basis of action undertaken in freedom, as we have seen above in various extracts from *Ethics*. Knowing who we are, as ones reconciled to God through Jesus Christ, means that we have peace with God (Rom. 5) and, secure in our identity before him, our peace with him makes us peacemakers with others.

Conclusion

In this chapter we have covered substantial terrain in mapping out three main dimensions of Christian identity. Emphasis has been placed on Christian identity finding its roots in Abraham. In bringing the various strands of our thinking together we can say that an identity rooted in Abraham will be relational, embracing individuals into a community which is God's primary agent of mission in blessing the nations. It is transcultural because it relativises all loyalties - ethnic and cultural, submitting all to the prior claim of attachment to the global body of Christ. It is an identity which takes a particular ethical shape, as Christians individually and corporately reflect the character of God, "to walk in all his ways" (Deut. 10:12ff.). It is an identity that is counter-cultural, for it requires, as with Abraham, a willingness to leave certain things behind and to reorder loyalties and allegiances in imitating the "Abrahamic revolution." And yet it is an identity which is world-affirming because the promised blessing has no boundaries attached, is not owned by any particular people, race or nation, and the blessings are comprehensive enough to cover the whole of life. For if, as we see in Genesis 1-11, the effects of sin and evil are

⁶⁸⁵. Bonhoeffer, *Sanctorum Communio*, 34.

⁶⁸⁶. Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers from Prison* (London: SCM, 1953), 165.

multi-dimensional - spiritual, intellectual, physical, and social, and if sin therefore impacts every area of human life, then the blessings of the gospel promised in Abraham must be as equally comprehensive. An identity rooted in Abraham therefore ensures it to be essentially missional in character.

A peacemaking ethos and lifestyle is created and sustained when Christians understand that their identity has been transformed and reshaped in Jesus Christ. This perspective lies at the heart of Ephesians 2. Peace is created as a result of the integration of the self and sustained not in isolation but in fellowship with our neighbour. We saw in Gerhardsson's work the importance of internalising certain things in the heart so as to enable a person to function as God intended across the full spectrum of life's relationships. Similarly, an internalising of how this change of identity has come about and what it means, enables an integration within the self, which produces a disposition of peaceableness. Bonhoeffer has been a rich store of wisdom on this, particularly on the crucial role of the Christian community: Christian growth and the integration of the self takes place as we are integrated with others in fellowship.

This chapter has argued that a reconciling and peacemaking presence within a complex, divided society like Malaysia necessitates a particular ethos among those who would exercise that presence. This is a way of thinking and acting, shaped and sustained by an identity which has historical, relational, and ecclesial dimensions and roots.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This thesis has taken up a key Christian doctrine, that of reconciliation, and explored and applied it to the modern Malaysian context, while at the same time linking the reconciling, peacemaking theme with another important concept relevant to Malaysia - that of identity. Our historical focus in chapter two helped to underline the difficulties that exist in mapping out a sense of Malaysian identity. What, for instance, does *bangsa Malaysia* mean in today's multiethnic Malaysia? The lack of a shared identity is a significant factor in the lack of progress towards a shared future.

The theology of reconciliation set out in chapter one, with its importance in the theology of mission, provides a strong foundation for Malaysian Christians to respond to the issues they face in their divided society. As followers of the Prince of Peace, Malaysian Christians are called to the task of reconciliation and to be peaceable citizens. We have argued that this ethos of peacemaking will be shaped and sustained when Malaysian Christians understand what constitutes Christian identity. We have also said how crucial it is that Malaysian Christians draw from their contemporary and historical background, as well as from the Christian Scriptures, in understanding their Christian identity.

Christian Identity and its Importance for Reconciliation in the Malaysian Context: Some Conclusions

At one level, it seems bland to conclude as we do in this thesis on the importance of reconciliation, unity and a sense of identity. Yet, as is demonstrated by Sharon Heaney in her study of Latin American evangelical theology, it is not rich theological sophistication

that promotes wholesome effects, but faithfulness to basic theological insights.⁶⁸⁷ The integrity and radicalness of Christian witness in multicultural Malaysia is dependent upon the extent to which Malaysian Christians are able to demonstrate how Christ recreates and shapes their identity. This can enable the Malaysian church to be an agent of reconciliation because a healthy Christian identity helps shape social engagement, builds bridges with other communities, and promotes unity.

Identity that Shapes Social Engagement

From the historical perspective of chapter two, the outcomes of the research in chapter three, and the seven themes of chapter four, we can identify the need for Christians in Malaysia to have a stronger sense of their Malaysian Christian identity. While developing a *theology* of social concern depends on our self-understanding, it is only social *practice* that will concretely shape our identity. A stronger sense of identity will help shape and sustain Christian communities, enabling them to withstand whatever marginalising effects may result from government impositions because of their minority status. Such an identity will not only be self-consciously global in its scope but distinctively local in its expression. It will be an identity that not only celebrates its connectedness to the people of God in space and time, but is equally at home in the cultural and ethnic specifics of Malaysia and able to express Christian faith in contextually appropriate ways. This will be an identity that overcomes the perception by non-Christians that it is somehow less than Asian, or less than Malaysian, to be a Christian.⁶⁸⁸

⁶⁸⁷. Sharon E. Heaney, *Contextual Theology for Latin America: Liberation Themes in Evangelical Perspective* (Milton Keynes / Colorado Springs: Paternoster, 2008).

⁶⁸⁸. As noted earlier, 'Asian' and 'Malaysian' identity has been used interchangeably for the purposes of this thesis. The distinction between the two is briefly discussed on page 264.

Identity that Builds Bridges

A more confident self-identity may then find expression in the community of the local church. An important aspect of this expression would be the intentionality of becoming a more integrated congregation - a racially reconciled community that embodies and points towards the unity and integration that Malaysian society itself is searching for. A church which is secure in its identity will be more confident in relating to others in a pluralist society. It will be less likely to feel threatened by the thought of cooperating with other faith groups. Indeed, such cooperation can become an avenue for Christians to gain a deeper understanding of non-Christian communities, opening up opportunities for dialogue and witness, and for combining resources to cooperate in certain areas for the common good. This kind of interaction allows for friendship and respect to develop, for Malaysian Christians to live as well as speak the gospel, and for evangelism to be carried out with greater sensitivity - becoming more relational and less confrontational. All this creates opportunities for mutual understanding and transformation, thereby fostering a growing sense of commitment to all sections of the community that make up the nation of Malaysia. A Malaysian Christian identity, worked out in concrete, compassionate ways within the wider community can serve to strengthen a deeper sense of commitment to the nation. This would be a holistic commitment which, in addition to the social and economic aspects of national life, would include a concern for Malaysia's spiritual well-being. By being agents of reconciliation and peacemaking in Malaysian society, Malaysian churches can create the social space for the gospel that enables them to proclaim the Peacemaker.

Identity that Promotes Unity

A sense of identity as the people of God assists the church in modelling unity and integration to a fragmented society. Churches that demonstrate a concern for unity within and among themselves and for visibly expressing that unity, will offer a more credible

witness to the wider society. The Latin American theologian Rene Padilla writes that "the church is called to be, both locally and globally, the community of reconciliation fully committed to unity and mutual acceptance in the midst of diversity, fragmentation, discrimination, exclusion, and social apartheid." For Padilla, mission begins with "churches that embody the gospel of reconciliation... whose constituency is a visible illustration of God's reconciling purpose in Jesus Christ..." Such churches, argues Padilla, are "in a unique position to take the initiative in promoting the kind of open dialogue which is needed in order to enable civil society to find ways to cooperate towards the solution of social and ecological problems."⁶⁸⁹ We would contend that the formation of these kinds of churches and the development of this kind of witness is intimately connected to the question of identity.

Recommendations for Further Research

Various lines of enquiry emerge from the findings of this thesis. We shall limit ourselves to recommending five that deserve further investigation.

1. Although our survey questionnaire of chapter three found the relative absence of peacemaking initiatives at the local church level, qualitative research focusing on particular congregations engaged in reconciliation projects at the grass-roots level is required. What is the profile of such congregations? Are there certain theological foundations underpinning their involvement in peacemaking? What is the nature of such projects and how is their effectiveness to be assessed?

⁶⁸⁹ C. Rene Padilla, "Mission at the Turn of the Century / Millennium". *Evangel* Vol. 19 no. 1 (2001): 11

2. This thesis raises questions about how the social implications of reconciliation can be included in Christian discipleship. Local church discipleship programmes may be an intriguing area of research. For instance, in such programmes, to what extent are new Malaysian Christians taught to understand the ethical implications of the gospel for Malaysian society in terms of reconciliation?

3. In our chapter four we briefly discussed the suggestion of having a baptismal confession which could help strengthen Christian identity. We would recommend further investigation on how Malaysian Christian identity might be shaped through corporate worship. Both points two and three underline the necessity of further work in the area of contextual theology and worship.

4. At several points in the thesis, and most notably in the survey questionnaire, the topic of multi-racial congregations has been raised. This has become an important area of research for sociologists and missiologists in the United States of America, but attention to the Malaysian context has been almost nil. Research in this area would be of value to church leaders and denominations in their church planting strategies. But beyond the realm of strategy, what would be the impact on local communities of intentionally developed multiracial, integrated congregations?

5. Further work is required on the theme of Christian identity in Malaysia from sociological, historical and theological perspectives. For instance, from a theological perspective, the theme of identity could be examined using the marks of the church. I have mentioned the mark of holiness on page 270, but what of the others - one, catholic, and apostolic, and how might they assist Malaysian Christians in shaping their identity?

Connected to this is the topic of conversion. When someone from a Muslim, Hindu, or Buddhist background becomes a Christian, to what extent can they form an identity that is Christian and yet still remain connected to their Malay, Indian or Chinese cultural roots?⁶⁹⁰

This thesis has made much of Schreiter's comment that what is needed for an effective reconciling presence in a broken world is not strategy but spirituality. Concluding his chapter on the relevance of Bonhoeffer for shaping a "transforming spirituality", Ng Kam Weng reminds Malaysian Christians that such a spirituality will be costly:

the Church that meets this challenge will be ready to win the world back to God, notwithstanding the difficulties encountered and the prospect of intensifying conflict in the future. Jesus therefore makes it clear beyond all doubt that the 'must' of suffering applies to his disciples no less than to himself... Lest it be interpreted only as a pious but futile hope let me point to the appeal from an intelligent but highly sensitive observer of the contemporary world, Albert Camus. "Christians should get away from abstraction and confront the bloodstained face history has taken on today. The grouping we need is a grouping of men resolved to speak out clearly and pay up personally."⁶⁹¹

⁶⁹⁰. In recent years there has been much debate on 'insider movements', especially in connection with Muslim contexts where individuals and groups are following Jesus but choosing to remaining within their Muslim community, and to participate in Mosque worship.

⁶⁹¹. Ng, *Bridge Building*, 40. The quote from Camus is taken from *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (Alfred Knopf, 1961), 71.

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